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Helen Shirk / Rethinking Beauty / John Iversen

Celebrity Jewelry
Beauty and the Beast
At Home in Nature
Jewelry as Emotion

SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICAN GOLDSMITHS VOL.31 / NO.1 / 2011

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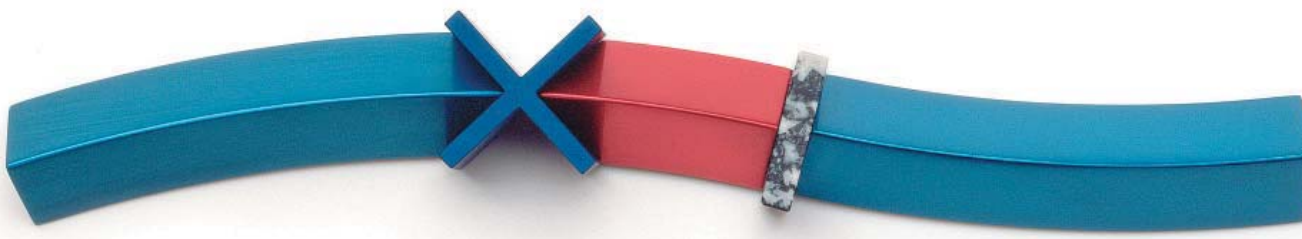

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Brooch, 1999
anodized aluminum, gold, granite, Monel, stainless steel
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works by
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ted noten
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THE QUESTION, WHAT IS BEAUTY? is almost as vexing as that of What is art? Both terms are slippery, and have been conveniently relegated to the subjective realm. In the past, beauty and art were united; an artist's job was the creation of beautiful things. But the two have now become divorced.

In our feature "Beauty and Other Monsters," jeweler Kristin Beeler ponders artists' waning authority on the topic. Beeler's own reexamination of beauty led her to see it less as the embodiment of calm perfection and more aligned with vulnerability, banality, and even monstrosity. Beauty "may, in fact, be quite challenging, maybe even hideous," muses Beeler. "We end up digging beauty out of our own mortality."

Whether artists explicitly declare allegiance to the beautiful, it remains an implicit aspect of all visual art. The two metalsmiths featured in this issue, John Iversen and Helen Shirk, have both arrived at a similar sense of beauty. Iversen makes a virtue out of the impossibility of complete control. "I could never make a perfect sphere," he states; so instead he creates exquisite forms of fractured geometry. Even his precise renderings of leaves favor the poignancy of irregularity and decay. "It's not that we cherish decay," Iversen says, "but we want to hold onto something. That is a key to art: trying to make the feeling last, trying to make it visible." Feeling trumps perfection in Iversen's captivating work, and the result is beauty born of broken form.

Shirk's work is deeply rooted in the natural world and the generative life force of plants. Like Iversen, she seeks to capture nature's feeling, not just its appearance. According to author Marjorie Simon, "Rather than trying to faithfully reproduce a botanical reality, Shirk aims at creating a kind of emotional truth." Shirk's embrace of nature does not exclude its darker tones. Indeed, her work's complex beauty thrives on a fusion of "delicacy and strength, splendour and oddity, sanctuary and peril, death and renewal."

Maybe beauty isn't a property of objects, after all. Perhaps it only exists as a feeling, the afterglow of an arousing encounter. As Beeler writes, "We experience beauty as an internal sigh of relief when our senses connect sympathetically with the external." Hopefully you will find such cause to sigh in these pages….

The mission of *Metalsmith* magazine is to document, analyze, and promote excellence in art, design, jewelry and metalsmithing. In fulfillment of the goal of producing a significant document of the field, editorial content will emphasize contemporary activities and ideas, with supportive content to include relevant historical work and critical issues.

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Published by the Society of North American Goldsmiths

Artists. Designers. Jewelers. Metalsmiths.
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PRINTER St Croix Press, Inc., committed to using environmentally friendly materials and methods.

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Metalsmith (ISSN 0270-1146) is published in January, March, May, August, and October by SNAG, 540 Oak Street, Suite A, Eugene, OR 97401, 541-345-5689, www.snagmetalsmith.org.

Membership rates $79/year and up, full membership includes five-issue subscription to *Metalsmith*. Special student rates. Subscription to only *Metalsmith*: $34/year and up.

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Metalsmith is not forwarded by the post office. Send all address changes and any other requests, including missing issues, to SNAG, 540 Oak Street, Suite A, Eugene, OR 97401, 541-345-5689, info@snagmetalsmith.org. Claims for missing issues are accepted only if received within three months of publication.

The opinions expressed in *Metalsmith* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the staff or directors of SNAG or *Metalsmith*. Address unsolicited editorial material to: Suzanne Ramljak, 22 Rockwell Road, Bethel, CT 06801. Materials will be handled with care, but the magazine assumes no responsibility for them.

Metalsmith is indexed in the Art Index and EBSCO Media. Newsstand distribution: COMAG Marketing Group, 155 Village Blvd, Princeton, NJ 08540.

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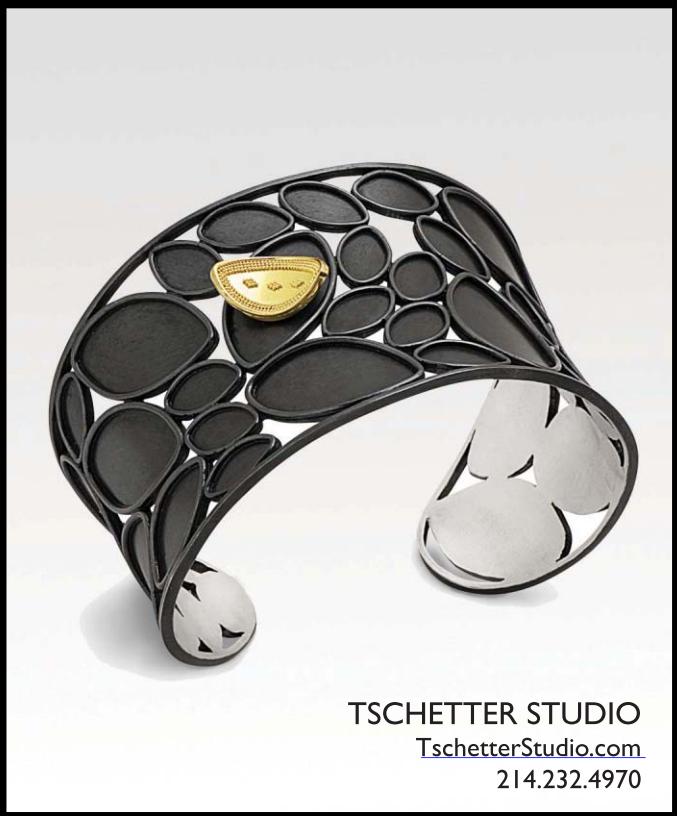

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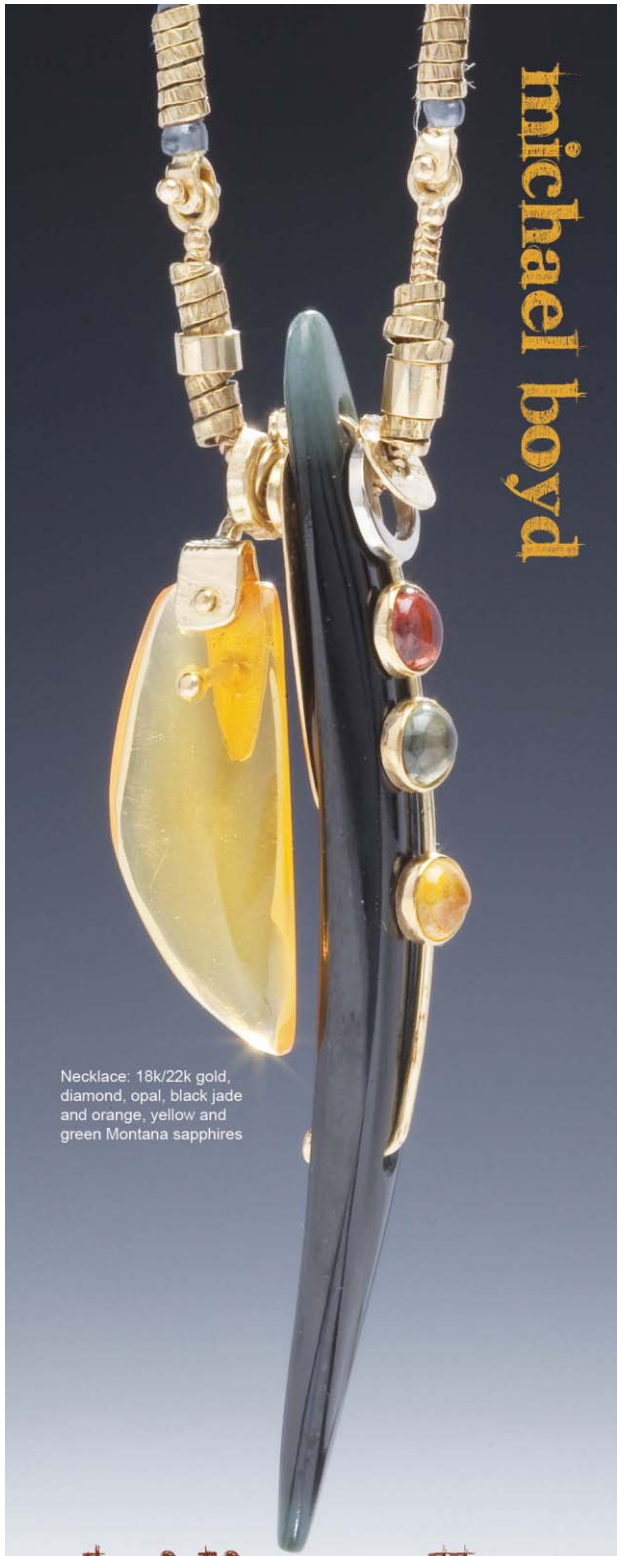
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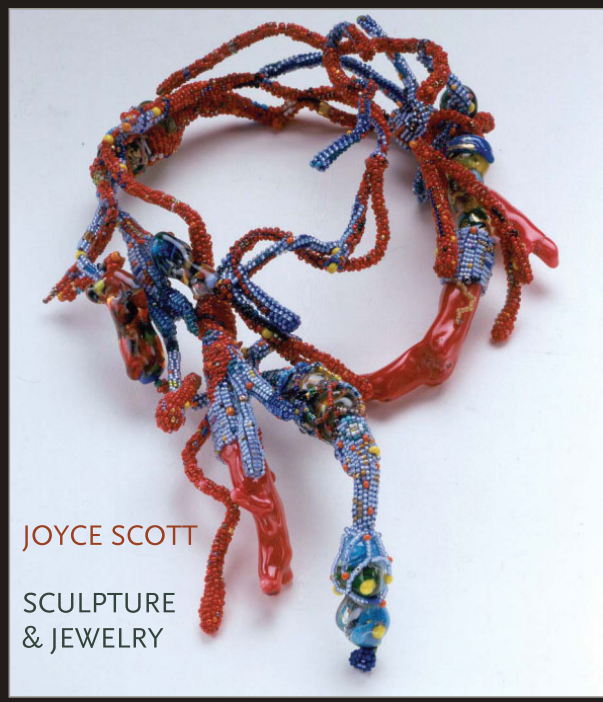

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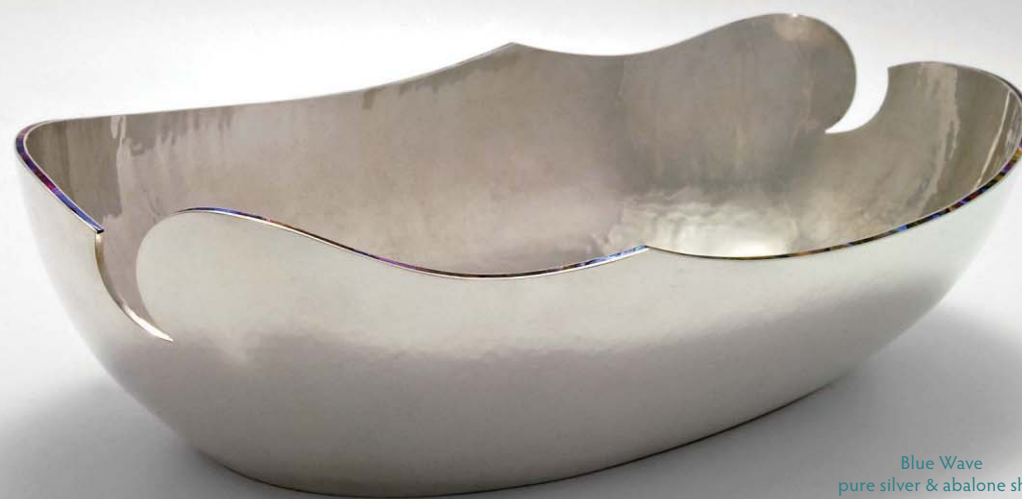

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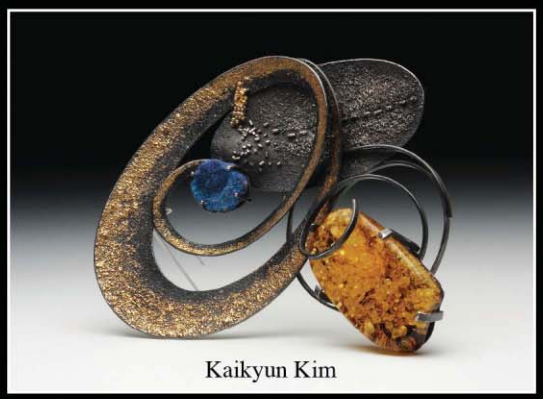

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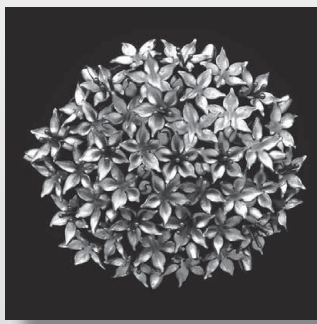

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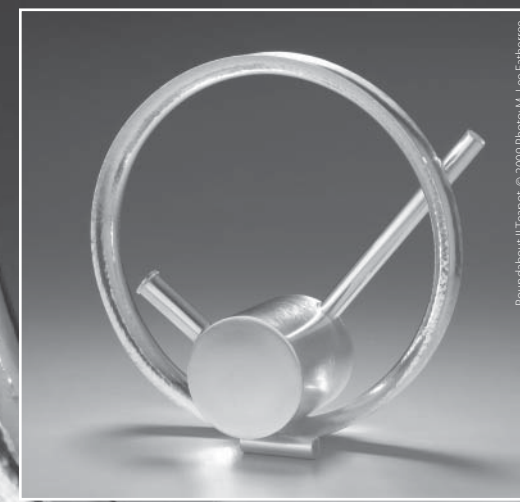

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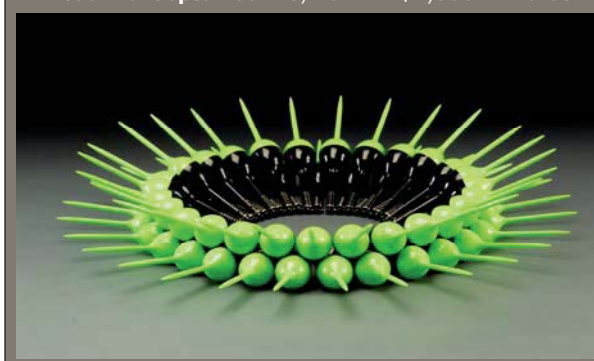

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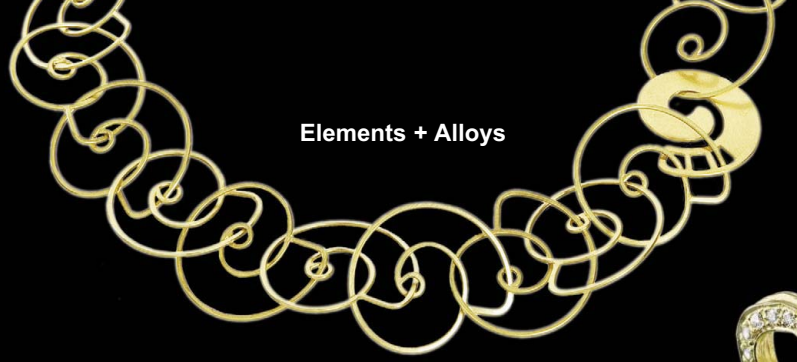

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Lisa Gralnick: The Gold Standard

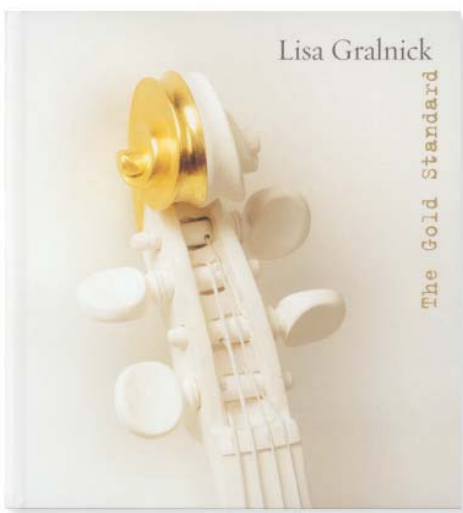
MICHAEL JAY MCCLURE AND TACEY A. ROSOLOWSKI
BELLEVUE ARTS MUSEUM, BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON, 2010
BY MARJORIE SIMON

Giampaolo Babetto: L'Italianatà dei Gioielli

FLORIAN HUFNAGL, EDITOR
ARNOLDSCHE ART PUBLISHERS, STUTTGART, 2010
BY URSULA ILSE-NEUMAN

THE COVER IMAGE of a chalky white violin with a partly gilded scroll sets the tone for the exhibition catalogue of *The Gold Standard*, Lisa Gralnick's recent monumental undertaking. Elements of Gralnick's personal and emotional narrative permeate the text and images. The more you know about her (for example, that she is an accomplished violinist and nearly became a professional one) the more resonance can be found in the work. Nora E. Atkinson's illuminating interview with Gralnick allows readers to hear the voice of the artist without theoretical interpretation; she explains how the work evolved, where her ideas come from, and her material choices, especially the juxtaposition of gold and plaster. Tacey Rosolowski's theoretical essay addresses the intersection of object and text: our visual culture and dematerialized contemporary art privilege image, yet text is always present in museum presentations of the same art. Gralnick, whose work is by no means dematerialized, has been steadfast in identifying with the material world of craft. Ironically, her contemplation of the equivalency of language and sight results in a text-heavy arrangement of objects and their narratives.

The Gold Standard is divided into three parts. The first, "Commodification and the Sensible Economy," consists of objects from Gralnick's life (her hands, her violin, her shoes) cast in white plaster, whose value has been calculated and a key part replaced with an equivalent amount of gold. For example, part of the scroll of Gralnick's violin has been replaced with gold equal to the value of the violin. Explanatory titles are engraved in gold block letters on white plaster, giving the entire section a formal grace.



For Part II, "Phenomenology and Substantialism," Gralnick purchased jewelry and gold items from their owners, cast them in plaster, and then used them to create the tangible objects in Part III, "Transubstantiation and the Historicized Object." She documented their history with labels typed on an old manual typewriter, its jumpy script giving life to the now disappeared objects. In Part II, Gralnick shares the narrative with the original owner of the gold. In Part III she reclaims the objects by creating a narrative that is fabricated yet nonetheless meaningful. The sense of loss that hangs over the entire project also parallels Gralnick's recent decision to cease making jewelry. It is our loss as well.

By creating her own narrative, Gralnick divests the objects of their history, negating their own pasts, and reconfiguring their putative futures. Moreover, in the time that has passed since Gralnick began this series, the cost of gold has risen exponentially, to the extent that it would be nearly impossible even to undertake this project today. So the whole idea becomes a product of a moment in history.

Gralnick recreates the standard museum display of object-with-text in three ways: straightforward reporting, homage (to the owners of the original jewelry/objects), and fictive history. The objects in Part III are a little more problematic. While unquestionably showcasing Gralnick's considerable fabrication skills, they are less mysterious and subtle. The "forgeries" of "Coin Collection Picture Gallery" recall the fictional enamel portraits of Jutta Klingebiel, with their tiny narratives in gold frames. By providing more information they leave less to the imagination. Yet their stated narratives are brave and confrontational, not least being Gralnick's relationship to her Jewish identity and the Holocaust.

Gralnick plays with our notion of truth. We believe her when she tells us the value of, say, the shoes vis-à-vis the gold on the day she started that piece. But should we believe the narrative of the *Fringe Necklace* in Part III? Does the actual truth of the object matter, or only its virtual truth? Gralnick's complex ideas require complex execution; there can be no shortcuts here.

If the catalogue did no more than showcase the range of Gralnick's fierce intellect and material virtuosity, as shown, for example, in *Fourteen Unusually Small Rings,* it would be worthwhile. Her

explanations clarify and contextualize her exceptional goldwork. In documenting the work, there remains the inescapable problem of catalogues: that of scale. All of the objects are pictured the same size, from the vacuum cleaner to the coin collection. Yet the value of the catalogue is in its totality: the artist's voice, the interpreter's commentary, the documentation of the five to seven years that Gralnick spends on a given idea, and the ghostly grace of white objects on a page.

Marjorie Simon is a jeweler and writer based in Philadelphia.

ITALIAN GOLDSMITH Giampaolo Babetto occupies a position at the pinnacle of international studio, or "auteur," jewelry. Arguably the field's most celebrated and influential figure, the 63-year-old artist is a major exponent of the well-known "Padua School," and his embrace of an artistic philosophy deeply rooted in Italian culture is reflected in the rich and multi-faceted visual and structural language of his jewelry.

Arnoldsche's new publication, a co-production with the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, Germany, is a stunning yet intimate excursion into Babetto's life and work, allowing the reader to experience the range of influences that have been integrated into his artistic expression over the past four decades. In all, 111 jewelry pieces are presented in chronological order, beginning with a pair of gold earrings from 1967 and concluding with a 2009 ring of white gold, niello, and pigment. Representatives of the many series that have intrigued Babetto over the years are included in this compendium, notably those from the late 1980s and 1990s, in which he pays homage to the Italian Mannerist painter Jacopo Pontormo.

One of the many pleasures of this book is its intimate format. At slightly under five by seven inches, it is the polar opposite of the nearly ubiquitous coffee table format, and its diminutive size encourages contemplative reading. The book's dramatic color scheme—a black cover embossed in red, book pages with gilded edges, and brilliant blue and green covers on two smaller books that lie inside the outer case—intensifies the impression that the book is a precious object, both suggesting the gold and niello and colorful pigments favored by the artist and evoking the spirit of a medieval book of hours.

The book's unusual design, with the two inner volumes artfully attached to one another like a diptych that opens from the center, allows the reader to view Babetto's jewelry side by side with superb color and black-and-white photographs of the Palladian villas, classical architecture, olive groves, and small towns that dot the hilly countryside around Arquà Petrarca, where Babetto has lived and worked all his life. Snapshots of the artist at work and during quiet moments provide a personal touch and give insight into the man behind the jewelry. Although the untitled photographs speak for themselves, a brief but valuable foreword by Dr. Florian Hufnagl, director of the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and editor of the publication, adds to their appreciation.

One of the keys to the book's success is Ellen Maurer-Zillioli's illuminating essay, "Giampaolo Babetto—Jewellery, Vessels, Design," covering the development of Babetto's oeuvre and describing how materiality and spirituality are united in his work. In just a few incisive pages, the author describes how the core of Babetto's designs are grounded in respect for the aesthetics of antiquity through scale, ratio, proportion, and composition and then expanded through experiential encounters with a broad spectrum of Western contemporary art and through the artist's acute observations of his surroundings. The concluding essay, "Constructs by a Sensualist" by Dorothea Baumer, provides a complementary analysis of the artist's jewelry designs.

The book concludes with a biography, bibliography, and listings of prizes and awards, exhibitions, and public collections housing Babetto's jewelry.

The fact that Babetto's work can be presented in a fresh and revealing manner, and the novel treatment given Babetto's work in this volume, is a tribute to his artistic genius as well as a testament to the publisher's creativity. *Giampaolo Babetto: L'Italianatà dei Gioielli* is an essential acquisition for discerning connoisseurs of art jewelry and for all those interested in the life and art of the Veneto.

Ursula Ilse-Neuman is Curator of Jewelry at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York.

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Celebrity Jewelry
Brand Meets Bling

BY ANDREA DINOTO

YOU'RE FAMOUS; you're (possibly) gorgeous. You love jewelry. So don't just wear it; design it! That way, you can "share" it with fans eager to buy into your fabulous personal style. It's a brilliant marketing concept that takes celebrity endorsement to another level, that of total self-promotion, one in which the celeb is not merely licensing her name to, say, a perfume (J.Lo, Sarah Jessica, et al.), but actually designing a product expressive of her public persona.

The most recent superstar blingster to crash this thriving scene is tennis diva Serena Williams, whose jewelry (plus clothing and accessory) line is offered through Home Shopping Network, home as well to the collections of television actress Tori Spelling, soap star Susan Lucci, supermodel Iman, and singer-doll collector Marie Osmond. The doyenne of this phenomenon would have to be comic and red-carpet commentator Joan Rivers. She's celebrating her twentieth year as a celebrity jewelry maven on *QVC*, *HSN*'s competitor in the powerful direct-*TV* and online marketing field, where much of the jewelry sells for under $100. (Serena's glittery pavé dome ring is only $64.95; Lucci's eye-popping *CZ* "statement ring" a mere $39.95).

Celebrity jewelry has no aspirations to cutting-edge design. Rather, it's crowd-pleasing by nature. A look at the field provides a short course in Marketing 101. First comes branding, by which an individual with global recognition creates (with professional assistance, most assuredly) merchandise that often capitalizes on the celebrity's peaking popularity or serves to revitalize—monetarily or otherwise—a flagging career. Either way, the resultant merchandise extends the celeb's fan base, be it among kids, teenagers, or adults who aspire to her particular style.

On the shopping networks, direct interaction between celebrity and buyer is key. Consumers call in to talk to their idols (who typically appear for on-air sessions once every three months), sharing enthusiasm and even ideas that influence design variations. Fans also write "reviews" of merchandise that are posted, whether negative or positive, on the network's web sites. Brad Bohnert, director of public relations and events for *HSN*, emphasizes the importance of celebrity involvement in product design, citing "savvy customers" who could easily detect a star's detachment. "Tori [Spelling, co-star of the popular Oxygen reality show "Tori & Dean"] really works closely on the design of all pieces," he maintains. "She listens to customers and takes their comments into consideration." For example, one fan requested that a gold-toned necklace be produced in silver, and it was.

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Joan Rivers relies unabashedly on external sources for inspiration. "This is straight out of the Sotheby's catalogue," she announced on air of a knuckle-length emerald-cut crystal cocktail ring, a highlight of her Spring 2010 collection. Rivers's first *QVC* collection was based on her own precious jewelry, which she turned into affordable knock-offs that have been selling like veritable hotcakes ever since. Now, she offers mainly dependable fashionista standards such as faceted bead necklaces and bold cuffs, although her animal brooches, something of a specialty, can reveal a bit of comedic flair—witness a bee gotten up in a bejeweled stars-and-stripes motif.

But, surprise, surprise, celebrity jewelry is not exclusively a low- to-mid-market enterprise. Although super-affordable basic costume pieces are the mainstay of the shopping channels, fine celebrity jewelry can also be found in luxury emporiums and boutiques. In the case of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, whose ultimate "Brangelina" brand needs no tweaking, the intention is to benefit their Education Partnership for Children of Conflict via sales of "The Protector" collection of attractive, gem-set snake-motif fine jewelry and men's and baby accessories produced by luxury-goods emporium Asprey. The snake theme derives from a serpent ring Jolie received as a protective talisman during her first pregnancy. The couple makes no claims at direct involvement in design. All proceeds benefit their foundation, but Asprey's association with Brangelina can only help

BRAD PITT AND ANGELINA JOLIE FOR ASPREY
Snake Ring from
"The Protector" series
pavé diamonds

JOAN RIVERS
Stars & Stripes Bee Pin
goldtone metal, epoxy
enamel, pavé crystals
1 ⅛ x 1 ½"

SHIRLEY MACLAINE
Chakra Festival Bracelet
sterling silver, amethyst,
lolite, fluorite, peridot,
citrine, carnelian, garnet

IVANKA TRUMP
Ring from the
"Bubble Collection"
18k white gold, rock crystal,
mother-of-pearl, diamonds

to update the image of this tradition-bound British firm.

Then there is Ivanka Trump, the glamorous twenty-something realtor, fashion icon, and former model who launched a line of fine jewelry in 2007 in partnership with Dynamic Diamond Corp. A savvy and accomplished businesswoman, Trump markets her well-made jewelry to affluent peers, selling both online and in her own Madison Avenue boutique, at prices ranging from $750 to $2,500 and up. Trump expresses the view that her endeavor—which recently expanded to wholesale—fills a "void" in the jewelry world for "design-oriented luxury jewelry" that "puts a modern twist on desirable classics." She is billed as the creative director behind her ten "heirloom chic" design lines (including couture), and works with an in-house designer on every piece.

In another dimension entirely is Oscar-winning actress and quirky New Age author Shirley MacLaine, whose line of well-designed silver and semiprecious stone chakra jewelry, sold through her web site, expresses the star's belief in beneficent force fields associated with certain materials and symbols—crop circles, for example.

What celebrity jewelers demonstrate is that when it comes to design, all you need is a love of jewelry, a good marketing partner, and possibly a belief in a higher power.

Andrea DiNoto is a New York–based writer on arts and design.

Futhermore:
jewelry.hsn.com
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Donna D'Aquino
A Fine Line

BY ANDREA DINOTO

"I NEVER KNOW where I am and what time it is," says Donna D'Aquino. She's only partly joking about her life on the road, a life she's chosen as a hard-working, and literally hard-driving, production jeweler. D'Aquino travels around the country eleven months a year to craft shows, fairs, and gallery invitationals, her trusty Honda Element packed to the nines with the four distinctive jewelry lines she has developed for varying markets. Last summer she traveled to craft fairs in Connecticut, Michigan, Colorado, San Francisco and Wyoming, and still managed to tuck in a week of recreational travel with her dad, driving through Grand Teton National Park and down the spectacular Pacific Coast highway from Oregon to the California redwoods.

D'Aquino is a bit of an anomaly on the craft fair circuit, in that she has a solid academic background, which includes an MFA in jewelry/metalsmithing from Kent State University. Originally she studied graphic design, intending to be an illustrator. As an undergraduate, she took jewelry courses and began experimenting with developing a low-end production line. Her first attempt was a pair of earrings and a bracelet; when she proudly showed her professor, he asked her how long it had taken to make them. "I said, '60 hours,' and he laughed," says D'Aquino.

View of Donna D'Aquino's craft fair booth, 2009

Coming out of school, D'Aquino explains, "I didn't feel I had the tools to make a living being an artist." After working at a number of jobs over ten years, both in and out of the jewelry business, she decided in 1996 to go to graduate school at Kent State, intending eventually to teach. "My focus in grad school was on making one-of-a-kind jewelry and finding out who I was," she says. It was here that D'Aquino began to develop her signature steel-wire work, inspired by a workshop conducted by Robert Ebendorf. "He handed me wire and told me to draw," she says, and describes her sculptural cagelike bracelets and wire brooches as "three-dimensional drawings for the body and wall." On her own time, she continued to work on a low-end silver line that could be produced cost-effectively. After completing grad school, she immediately scheduled craft shows and began selling the high- and low-end lines at separate venues. At the same time, she was teaching at two universities.

D'Aquino soon realized "there was more money in jewelry than a teaching salary" and put all her energy into the work and promoting it. Eventually she understood that she could bring both lines together to appeal to a varied clientele. Her silver production line, of which she sells between 1,000 and 1,500 pieces a year, has a price range of $50 to $300. It is hand-fabricated and cast using sterling silver, pearls, hematite, and epoxy resins, and includes earrings, necklaces in different lengths, and bracelets. Her one-of-a-kind steel wire "Work in Line" pieces are sold both at fairs and though galleries such as Ornamentum, Facèré, and Velvet Da Vinci. D'Aquino sometimes adds vivid color to the wire pieces using a "plasti-dip" technique, notably for circle scatter pins that were featured in the 2003 SNAG conference Exhibition in Motion, strewn stunningly over a black dress. In another variation, she combines forged steel and 18 karat gold. Depending on size, "Work in Line" pieces range in price from $50 to $250, with unique brooches at $450 to $1,100 and unique bracelets at $750 to $2,000. D'Aquino estimates she sells about ten high-end pieces a year.

The process by which D'Aquino arranges her annual itineraries is fairly complex, and the actual traveling, setting up, and selling arduous. Any show must be applied for annually and accepted six months in

DONNA D'AQUINO
Rings
sterling silver, 18k gold
approx. 1 x 1 x 1"

The artist in her Beacon, New York studio.

advance. An application involves sending three to five images of one's work plus a display image of the booth. For a 10-by 10-foot space, the booth fees range from $200 to $2,500 (the upscale venues, e.g. the ACC Baltimore show, can run to $2,000; one Chicago show is $2,500), payable in advance. Outdoor shows present specific challenges. At last year's Ann Arbor, Michigan, show, D'Aquino endured two days of tornado sirens and rainstorms, during which some people "lost everything." By now a seasoned professional, D'Aquino is careful to pack a sturdy tent, stakes, and weights. She usually sets up the day before opening, which entails five hours of work. Fairs generally run two to four days, and regardless of whether security is present, each evening she and her fellow exhibitors pack up "what you don't want stolen." The often eleven-hour selling day is spent engaging with customers, lookers, and buyers, some of whom "don't have a problem insulting you," she says. "It's not an easy way to make a living." And yet D'Aquino relishes being on the road. She especially values time spent with the "amazing craft show community of very bright, well traveled survivors" with whom she has a strong camaraderie. "We all understand how hard the other works," she says.

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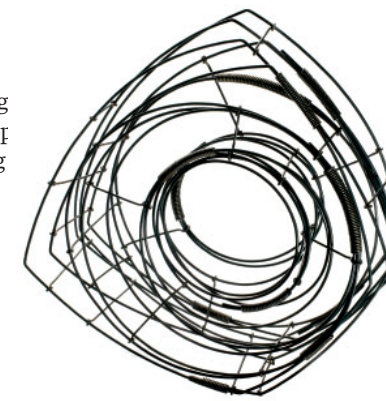
D'Aquino reports having a "very strong customer base in the Midwest, where peo have an incredible eye and understanding of the work." But, she adds, "Sadly, most people can't tell the difference between handmade and manufactured work, and new generations are not being educated as to what handmade American craft is." D'Aquino has won numerous awards and honors. Her work as been published in several books and most recently in *Vogue Italia*, which showcased one of her oversized wire bracelets on a provocatively un-attired model. Still, she maintains, "I don't follow magazine trends. The fashion world is not something I've ever targeted."

Despite her all-consuming traveling lifestyle, D'Aquino took time off over the past several years to care for her mother, who died of pancreatic cancer in March 2010. To help raise awareness of the general lack of research in this area, D'Aquino designed stainless steel key chains, whose sales through her web site are donated to pancreatic cancer research. D'Aquino's dreams for the future include someday devoting herself to sculpture and public art. But for the moment, whenever she's "out in public, not doing a show" and sees someone wearing her work she's thrilled. As D'Aquino says, reflecting on her efforts, "It really worked out."

Andrea DiNoto is a New York-based writer on arts and design.



DONNA D'AQUINO
Wire Bracelet
steel

Furthermore:
www.donnadaquino.com

Susan Beech
Driving Force

BY MIJA RIEDEL

OVER THE PAST 20 years, Susan Beech has amassed a body of jewelry that exudes curiosity, theatricality, sexuality, and an irreverent sense of humor. Her collection documents the evolution of her interests from precious to non-precious materials, from design to idea-based works, from primarily American to increasingly European artists, and from moderate brooches to oversize neckpieces. In content and spirit, Beech's collection embodies Robert Venturi's wry postmodern maxim, "Less is a bore."

Beech did not start out to build a collection. In her early thirties, she inherited her mother's heirloom jewelry and saw no need to purchase anything more. She credits her interest in contemporary jewelry to a few pivotal events, the first of which occurred in 1989, when she discovered the Susan Cummins Gallery in Mill Valley, California. Beech was intrigued by Margaret Barnaby's one-of-a-kind cuffs with transparent cabochons and polished surfaces reflecting insect silhouettes, and Judith Kaufman's rough-hewn gold brooches with large, unusual stones. "I had never seen jewelry like that," she says. In time, she became more interested in alternative work: Jamie Bennett's "Rocaille" series of enamels, Keith Lewis's brooches about friends lost to *AIDS*, Tina Rath's fur neckpieces, and Kiff Slemmons's "Tool Boxes."

Collector Susan Beech, wearing a neckpiece by Terhi Tolvanen

In 1998, Beech spent a long weekend in Seattle at the annual *SNAG* conference with the newly formed Art Jewelry Forum, at which she came across a necklace by Nancy Worden. The oversize collar was dominated by ten cast bronze arms, each twisting around as if to toss the pearl it held in its hand. The arms were separated by fat lozenges made from quarters that had been carved to spell out "SWINE." "I went from buying to collecting when I saw *Casting Pearls Before Swine*," Beech says. "It was so different. I thought, 'I can't believe I like this.' It was a wake-up call: jewelry didn't need to have boundaries, and didn't even have to be wearable."

On a 2004 visit to the London craft fair, COLLECT, Beech was struck by the accessibility of jewelry not locked in cases, and by the wealth of information available about the artists and their work. She attended lecture series, befriended dealers and artists, and spent days picking up brooches and neckrings, studying them from all angles. Over the next few years, Beech was increasingly drawn to the European aesthetic, and the emphasis on non-precious materials. She was taken in particular with Ruudt Peters's "Sefiroth" series, built around the Kabbalah and the Tree of Life, and with the artist's overall working process. "I like to see an artist come up with a whole original concept and then follow through with a really smart series. I'm attracted to work with a story behind it—not a narrative, but something more subtle," Beech said. "Peters's was a different vocabulary, strangely compelling, dark and mysterious. There was alchemy involved. He put materials together that shouldn't have worked but did." He also presented his work in installations that less resembled galleries than experimental theater.

Beech began to note the specific qualities that drew her attention: original ideas developed through multiple pieces, which are masterfully crafted, of substantial scale, and culturally or historically relevant. She began to collect European jewelry in earnest, focusing on Ruudt Peters, Terhi

A stainless steel and glass armoire commissioned from Jonathan Maxwell in 2008 to showcase parts of Beech's collection.

A selection of jewelry and other art on the dining room wall in Susan Beech's California home.

Tolvanen, and Evert Nijland (two of Peters's former students), Iris Eichenberg, Barbara Paganin, Annamarie Zanella, Felieke Van der Leest, and Lucy Sarneel. Beech found that her early interest in provocative jewelry, first discovered through Keith Lewis's "in your face" brooches about sex, AIDS, and the gay community, had room to grow in Europe. She purchased multiple neckpieces by the Idiots, made from taxidermied birds. She fell in love with two "Holy Sport" brooches by Gijs Bakker, which had the potential to engage—or incite—all manner of Christians and soccer fans, simultaneously. Back in the U.S., she became captivated by Sergey Jivetin's brooches, obsessively assembled from syringe needles.

Beech now knew almost immediately when a piece was destined to join her collection: "There's a physical reaction," she says. "A lot of times there's no rational reason why, but I can feel my heartbeat, I can feel something in the pit of my stomach. And when I find something I like, no one better get in my way."

By 2000, it was not enough to focus on her private collection. Beech was inspired to share her growing knowledge and help develop the field. She began working with Melissa Post and Mark Leach, curator and founding director, respectively, of the Mint Museum of Craft+Design, to help develop the museum's jewelry collection. Over the next few years, they together visited SOFA, COLLECT, galleries, and artists' studios and assembled a select body of jewelry by 14 artists from Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, South Africa, and the U.S., which emphasized novel ideas, varied materials, and strong design. Beech's contributions also paved the way for the museum to raise $40,000 specifically for the purchase of jewelry.

Beech's enthusiasm for Peters's avant-

garde installations and the easily accessed displays at COLLECT, combined with her experience with the Mint Museum, inspired her to rethink the presentation of her own jewelry. "I like to look at my collection," Beech says. "I like to feel it. I like to turn it over. I like to think about it." In 2008, she commissioned two massive armoires by Jonathan Maxwell and Kent Townsend. The more revealing of the two, Maxwell's six-by-six-foot vitrine of stainless steel and glass, underscores jewelry's site-specific and alchemical relationship to the body: rather than lying flaccidly on shelves, twelve of Beech's major neckpieces alight on simple, transparent busts. Presented in this format—elevated to vertical, lit theatrically, animated by human form and dimension—the neckpieces read like elaborate attributes signifying epic protagonists, from Scheherazade to Circe to Catwoman. As a group, they evoke the dramatic breadth, transformative nature, and archetypal resonance of adornment.

Over the past two decades, Beech has watched significant developments advance the field. She no longer has to wait for SOFA or COLLECT to see what's new; the Internet makes it possible to view exhibitions around the world, in real time. The Art Jewelry Forum has expanded its web site, replaced its quarterly newsletter with an up-to-the-minute blog, and sponsors annual lectures and awards. Certain jewelry galleries have expanded into new exhibition venues such as DesignMiami, and Beech is optimistic that a design audience might also "get the jewelry message." Jewelry is not beholden to any specific medium, Beech adds. "It is a field with few boundaries. The artist is free to create, their only limit being their imagination."

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Clearly jewelry has engaged Beech's imagination as well. Her collection is expanding into her environment. On the walls of her dining room, interspersed with small paintings by contemporary artists, hang a sawn iron necklace by Vera Siemund, an orange enamel neckpiece by Jasmin Winter, and a lariat of two narrow silver and acrylic feet by Maria Phillips. On nearby chests, Beech has installed Kiff Slemmons's *Medicine Cabinet*, which contains strands of transparent pills filled with paper fortunes and esoteric prescriptions, and Nancy Worden's *Lifting Weights* collar, a stepped system of pulleys and weights. Beech herself best sums up her collection—and her wry, full-throttle attitude towards it—with a nod to California's hot rod culture: "I don't wear my collection, I drive it." Ⓜ

Mija Riedel is working on a series of interviews for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

A cabinet by Kent Townsend, commissioned by Beech in 2008 to house her jewelry.

John Iversen
Fracture Lines

BY PATRICIA HARRIS AND DAVID LYON

Hanging On (brooch), 2010
sterling silver, 18k yellow gold
3 x 3 ½"

ALL PHOTOS: R. HENSLEIGH

Mark's Arm
(bracelet), 2010
oxidized sterling silver,
18k yellow gold
5 x 11"

Life Drawings (pendants), ca. 1979
oxidized sterling silver
top: 2 x 2"
below: 1 ½ x 1 ½"

Moon Stone (brooch), 1984
soapstone, epoxy, pigment, sterling silver, nickel
diameter 2 ½"

Landscape Stone (brooch), 1984
alabaster, epoxy, pigment, sterling silver, nickel
2 x 2"

AT HEART, JOHN IVERSEN IS A ROMANTIC. Like composers from Beethoven to Mahler or poets from Wordsworth to Rilke, he makes an absolute link between emotion and aesthetic experience. In fact, he argues, "Like painting is an emotion, jewelry is an emotion." It is intriguing to consider that beyond the aesthetic pleasure prompted by viewing, handling, and wearing jewelry, the piece of jewelry itself is a form of emotional expression. Thus, a brooch can be a kind of quantum art: simultaneously noun (object) and verb (action).

Indeed, there is a place for a reinterpreted Romanticism in contemporary jewelry. The nineteenth-century movement, which rescued aesthetics from formulaic classicism, put emotional experience front and center. It laid the ground for all manner of later aesthetic movements, from Impressionism to Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism.

Iversen is a "creator working in the spirit of his time," to paraphrase German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's definition of an artist. Though hardly a slave to the past, he sees his work within an aesthetic continuum and freely rummages through the art history attic to adapt what suits him. He is known, for example, for his mastery of the eighteenth-century technique of "nature casting," in which he replicates organic objects in metal. His lines of multiples rely extensively on castings of hydrangea flowers and small ginkgo leaves. But he also makes larger oak leaf pins, each one of a kind. "The leaves are ready-made, like Dadaist objects. I translate them into metal," Iversen says. "The art impulse is that I think that the leaf is a pin."

The artistic inquiry is more implicit in Iversen's recent works, which appear deceptively simple yet are remarkably complex. The assemblages of irregular shapes and forms fit together as tightly as the crust of a crème brûlée lightly tapped with a spoon. He casually calls the brooches and bracelets the "Crackle" series.

Some familiar with Iversen's nature castings have remarked that the new series represents a split personality, but he doesn't see it that way. First of all, he says, "Throughout my work there is a small core of forms, shapes, and colors." Moreover, he adds, the basis of all the work is his own "world view," a term that carries heavier philosophical baggage in Iversen's native German than it does in English. (*Weltanschauung* refers both to one's viewpoint for perceiving the world and the philosophical framework by which one interprets and interacts with it.)

Though hardly a slave to the past, he sees his work within an aesthetic continuum and freely rummages through the art history attic to adapt what suits him.

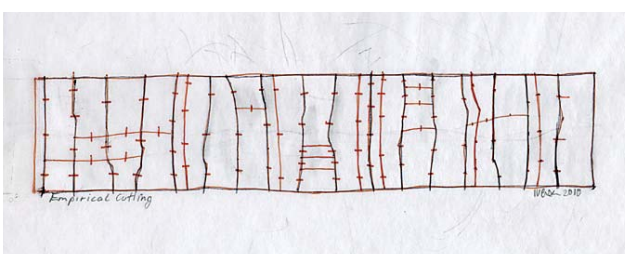
The "Crackle" series was inspired by "thirty years of working in jewelry," explains Iversen, who studied at the College for Metal Industries in Dusseldorf and interned for four years with an uncle in

Joint Effort (bracelet), 2009
sterling silver, 18k yellow gold
2 ¾ x 7 ½"

Empirical Cutting (bracelet), 2009
sterling silver, 18k yellow gold
1 ½ x 7"

Vancouver. He moved to New York in 1978 and established himself as an independent jeweler two years later. "This work has been evolving ever since I started making jewelry, learning how to make saw cuts. The new work is all done with hinging and a saw." His years of honing his technical facility made it possible to bring together years of observing how things fit together, both in nature and on the bench.

Certain modalities do reappear in both Iversen's representational and abstract pieces. For example, his "Life Drawings" pendants (circa 1979) are irregularly curved badges with stylized but recognizably naturalistic drawings saw-cut into the silver. Their shapes—essentially ovoid in either 5:4 or 4:3 dimensions—have recurred in his work in the last three decades. His instrument for "Life Drawings" is a saw, the same basic tool that he uses on the "Crackle" series both to draw and to segment. Moreover, the surface of the silver on these early pieces is deliberately roughened. Patina is critical in Iversen's work. "If it is just shiny metal," he says, "it looks industrial."



Preliminary drawing for *Empirical Cutting*, 2009
mixed media
7 x 8"

By the mid-1980s, Iversen had largely abandoned linear representation in favor of a more sculptural approach to jewelry. *Moon Stone* (1984) is a disk of soapstone with a scarified surface that is cut just deeply enough to accept a yellow-ochre pigment. Much the same treatment is given to the alabaster of *Landscape Stone* (1984), where mere hints of color suggest a world in a single rock.

In his leaf pins, Iversen goes beyond suggestion to full-blown Aristotelian mimesis. Yet he must perform significant interventions to create the illusion of an exact copy of an organic structure in metal. The nature casting technique is similar to lost wax casting, and Iversen is required to reinforce edges and certain structural components on the back of the leaves prior to casting. "What remains of the original is the surface structure, the veins," he says. "The minute we touch the front, it is ruined. You can't improve on it."

Iversen's point of view, or *Weltanschauung*, sets him apart from the traditional craftsman making a copy of a natural form. His primary intention is not the replication

of a leaf in bronze, silver, or gold. Instead, he is executing his conception of a piece of jewelry; that the leaf form has a nearly perfect analog in nature is almost coincidental. The process suggests the Romantic notion of art capturing emotion, while simultaneously creating an object that is outside emotion. Virtually every leaf that appeals to him has both a natural grace and an imperfection—a wormhole, perhaps—that hints of its mortality. "It's not that we cherish decay," he says, "but we want to hold onto something. That is a key to art: trying to make the feeling last, trying to make it visible."

Romanticism can embrace both representational and abstract forms. It is no contradiction when Iversen turns from naturalistic imagery like the leaf pins or his necklaces and bracelets of cast river pebbles to forms as specifically and clearly geometric as the hexagons in *Mark's Arm*, a bracelet of oxidized sterling silver forms assembled with largely hidden 18k yellow gold hinges. Although the piece dates from 2010, it is a continuation of his geometric series from 2008.

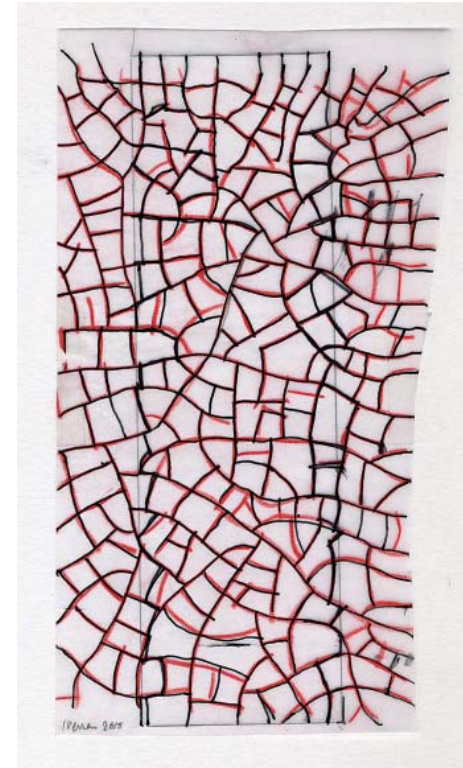
Formally speaking, the exquisite taper of *Mark's Arm* is a technical tour de force that confounds the eye. Each hexagon appears to be regular and the same size, yet those fitting the arm closest to the elbow are necessarily larger than those fitting nearer the wrist. Like a leaf, its scale swells at one end and diminishes at the other.

Cutting Links (2008) appears to be a prototype of the "Crackle" series, revealing how Iversen develops a body of work. On close inspection, the 16 small silver patches joined into a square brooch have edges as irregular as pieces of torn paper. In a sense, Iversen is making a virtue of what he sees as a technical weakness. "The things I could do if I could make a great square...," he says, sighing. "I am not that great a goldsmith. I could never make a perfect sphere." His strength, he suggests, is akin to that heralded by the Arts & Crafts movement, where emotive power derived from direct expression in metal. For all the control of his recent body of work, its genesis is more Dionysian than Apollonian: passion over order.

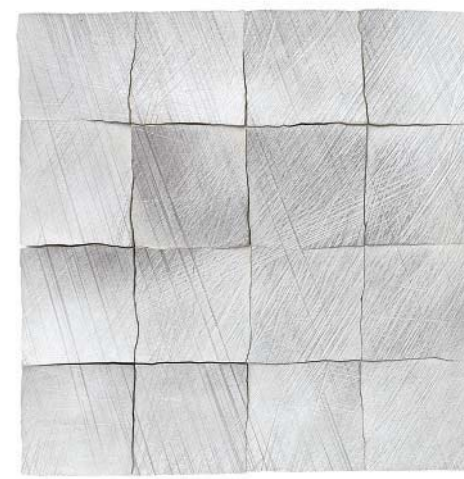
Iversen's breakthrough in the "Crackle" series was his realization that he could discard formal geometry and still maintain an abstract complexity. "Inspiration is in the moment," he says. "You see it and feel it and try to hold onto it." He imagined the jagged, ragged patterns of shattered glass, and wondered how to translate them into jewelry.

The seemingly haphazard fracture lines of the "Crackle" series are anything but random. The preliminary drawing for his *Empirical Cutting* bracelet shows a plan of attack on the metal, complete with dozens of hinge points. The very title suggests a process of trial and error: testing the hypothesis of the drawing against the realities of composition once he began cutting. Measurement, of course, is impossible. As Iversen says, "Even a pencil line has two dimensions."

The fractured forms of the finished bracelet are far more complex than the drawing. The way Iversen



Preliminary drawing for
Joint Effort, 2009
mixed media
9 ¼ x 5 ¾"



Cutting Links (brooch), 2008
sterling silver, 18k yellow gold
3 ½ x 3 ½"

Witchcraft (bracelet), 2010
14k red gold, 18k yellow gold,
14k green gold, 14k white gold
2 ½ x 7"

attached the separate elements is key to making the piece function as jewelry. Iversen has always been inventive in his assemblies. He is able to make numerous permutations of his "Hydrangea" series based on flower petals because, as he points out, it is only necessary to find three points of attachment for each floret. His ongoing "Jacks" series of gold bars and small pearls makes the connections central to the design. But he wanted something different for the "Crackle" series.

"From the beginning, I made an effort to make the pieces flexible and fluid, but I did not want the structure to be visible," Iversen says. Placing the attachments on the back gives him a certain pleasure. "I love the effect of having an intimate secret," he says. "I compare it to finding a shell with a pearl inside. You get to keep it to yourself."

In the end, he created hinges on all sides of each segment. Linking one piece to the next with a tiny loop gives the finished composition great flexibility in two dimensions, while allowing limited rotation.

That flexibility is essential to a bracelet, but is

potentially disastrous for a brooch. Iversen tackled the compositional challenge by organizing his cuts in an approximately radial pattern in *Falling Apart* (2009)—as if a meteor had fallen on a mud patch and left behind a crack-laced field. *Cutting Ahead* (2009) employs similar arcs in the composition. The individual adjoining segments are quite flexible, but by setting the arcs at angles to each other, Iversen creates a physically rigorous (and therefore wearable) composition. He further displays his mastery of form by leaving negative spaces in *Cutting Ahead*, a compositional device that highlights the complexity of the brooch's architecture. As the title suggests, the hinged attachments are critical to *Hanging On* (2010), which reprises in flat silver some of the shapes characteristic of Iversen's pebble compositions. He breathes space and air into *Hanging On* without sacrificing his commitment to hidden attachments and his aim of overall flexibility.

In the sheer complexity of individual "shards" and the intricacy of their jigsaw-puzzle fit, the bracelet *Joint Effort* (2009) represents the logical development of the

Cutting Ahead (brooch), 2009
sterling silver, 18k yellow gold
3 ½ x 3 ½"

Leaf Pins, 2010
oxidized bronze
3 ¼ x 1 ½–2 ½"

Six Part Large Hydrangea Earrings, 2010
oxidized 18k yellow gold
1 ¼ x 1 ¼ x ¾"

"Crackle" series. All the elements of the series come together perfectly: intricate composition, chain mail-like shimmering movement, and the characteristic briskly pickle-white color of the silver. "My collection the year before was all oxidized gray," Iversen says, almost offhandedly. "I thought that was getting depressing."

Iversen has always deliberately left his maker's mark on the metal. But he ratcheted up the abuse of surface for the "Crackle" series. "The finish on the new work is very aggressive," he admits. "It is very 'in the moment,' with big movements and very physical. I gouge and cut the surface of the silver. I use a burr, I use a belt sander. An abstract expressionist who was a jeweler would have done it this way. Texture and surface are like handwriting." The resulting surfaces are rich with fascinating detail, from macro scratches to almost microscopic traces. They prove his point that, at least in his work, polished surfaces are paradoxically dull.

Because each piece in the "Crackle" series is an abstract configuration within a bounded shape, Iversen is free to explore a variety of features of non-pictorial art. One of his most recent pieces, *Witchcraft* (2010), uses variegated surface texturing on each of the constituent pieces to suggest different strata and to create an illusion of depth. Iversen often creates running tracks and gouges that provide a continuum from element to element within a "Crackle" piece. In *Witchcraft*, however, they assume different angles, as if he were composing with stones taken from different geological strata.

The greatest departure from other "Crackle" pieces, however, comes in his choice of materials. Rather than employ sterling silver for most of the face pieces and restrict the use of gold to the hinges, *Witchcraft* is a mosaic of 14k red, green, and white gold with 18k yellow gold. His preliminary drawing for the bracelet only highlights the yellow gold, leaving the other colors to be chosen as he composed the piece. *Witchcraft* also contains lacunae, or small voids, providing Iversen with yet another color for his palette: flesh. The subtle gradations of hue contrast markedly with Iversen's occasional forays into enamel—those pieces have always been about color for its own sake. In *Witchcraft*, color is a compositional tool.

An abstract expressionist who was a jeweler would have done it this way. Texture and surface are like handwriting.

So far, Iversen has scouted a lot of new artistic territory with the "Crackle" series, and it is intriguing to see what will happen as he explores further. The use of rough-edged, saw-cut metal implies a kind of free expressiveness as he works at the bench, while the exquisitely careful compositions demonstrate a masterful level of control. The "handwriting" of his distressed surfaces provides him yet another compositional tool, while the juxtaposed colors of metal seem almost as if he is reveling in the sheer metalness of the gold. "Metal has a life of its own," Iversen says. His task is to give it feeling.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon write from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Furthermore:
www.patina-gallery.com
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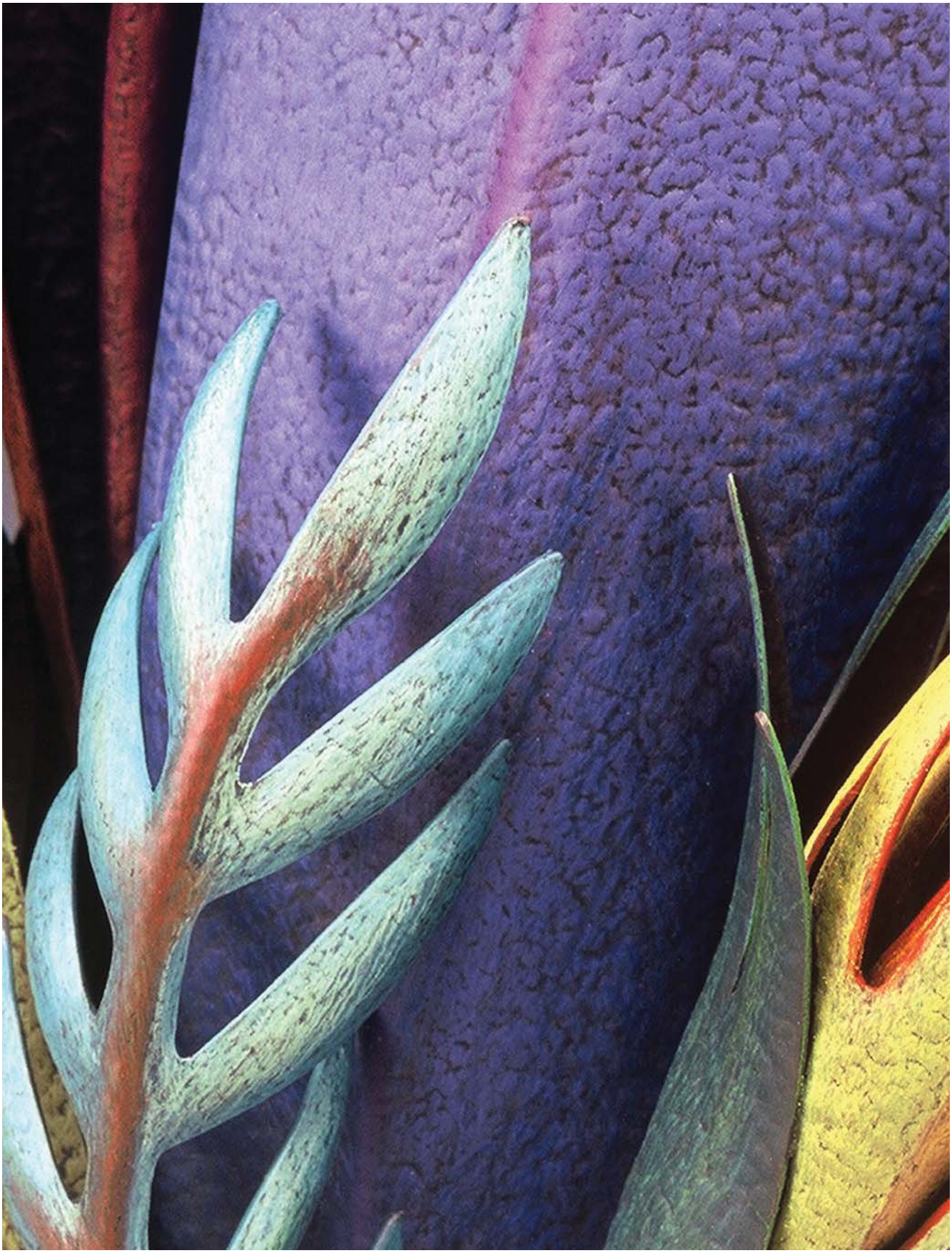
www.ornamentumgallery.com

Helen Shirk
At Home in Nature

BY MARJORIE SIMON

Violet Hood Commemorative Cup XVIII, 2005
copper, patina, colored pencils
18 x 20 x 11"
COLLECTION OF NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK



HELEN SHIRK'S NAME appears in nearly every year of *Metalsmith's* publication, including more than one "Exhibition in Print," so it seems important, on the occasion of Shirk's retirement from 35 years of teaching at San Diego State University, to take the measure of her incomparable contribution to metalsmithing. Included in "Young Americans" exhibition as early as 1962, Shirk was also singled out for recognition in the very first SNAG exhibition, *Goldsmith '70*. Her work is collected in numerous museums, including the Victoria & Albert, and a list of publications and exhibitions runs into the hundreds. She is routinely mentioned in design publications and reference books on women artists. She has been awarded two NEA fellowships and in 1999 was elected a Fellow of the American Crafts Council. Her work spans nearly a half-century of American metalsmithing and in so doing reflects the changing thematic and material concerns of the field.

Shirk's long working life supports what evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould called "punctuated equilibrium," that is, periods of explosive change alternating with periods of stasis. Not that Shirk has ever been static, but she appears to delight in startling our expectations about every 15 years: turning away from the sleek Nordic constructivism of her post-graduate years in the 1970s to the assertive and raw etched double-walled bowls of the 1980s to the velvety tropical implied folds of "sustaining spirit" vessels in the 1990s. Next, fronds rose from dank forest shadows into the light, to become, near the turn of the century, vivid flora, and now, a return to jewelry: brooches whose shadowed silhouettes seem haunted by loss.

Silver Decanter, 1979
silver, copper, brass
10 x 5 x 4"
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK

Helen Shirk would probably have been an artist anywhere, but her particular trajectory was set in motion by geography and biography. Shirk's father, a physician in Buffalo, New York, established the ground rules for college applications for his twin daughters in the 1960s: the school they would both attend had to be in state, and had to have a strong arts curriculum for Helen, a New York State Regents' Scholar, and a baccalaureate nursing degree (not "just" an R.N.) for her sister. Skidmore College, a women's college at the time located in Saratoga Springs, fit the bill. An opening in a jewelry class that met at a convenient time brought Shirk to Earl Pardon, the first of her influential metals professors.

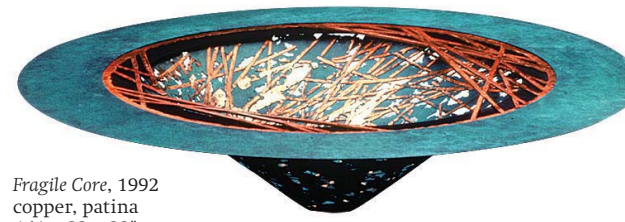
Pardon trained several generations of remarkable twentieth-century metalsmiths, many of them women. His own work included classical silversmithing and enameling, flatware, and large-scale wall works, as well as painting. Fortuitously, freshman Shirk's "big sister" was jeweler-to-be Glenda Arentzen. An exchange program in Denmark welcomed foreign students; former Skidmore student Arline Fisch had already participated. With Pardon's encouragement Shirk applied for and received a Fulbright fellowship in 1963. With the other U.S. scholars, she sailed to Copenhagen, where they initially took language classes together, lived in student accommodations scattered throughout the city, and worked independently as their disciplines required. For Shirk this was a sea change from living on a women's college campus in the 1960s. While in Denmark Shirk was influenced by the cool Scandinavian aesthetic of the time, yet she brought her own American energy to even the serene decanter.

On her return to the United States, Shirk entered Indiana University, where she began her MFA graduate study with the legendary Alma Eikerman, who had been responsible for bringing Scandinavian metalsmithing to the United States. In Sweden Eikerman had learned to fabricate by doing. She insisted that students have control over their materials, and Shirk credits Eikerman with developing her "valuable metal-moving skills."[1] It has often been said that Eikerman's constructivist style can be identified in the work of her graduates, and in this regard Shirk was no exception. At that time her "primary material was sterling silver; [her] approach was additive, building up the three-dimensional structure through soldered fabrication of smaller parts

that were individually formed," she says. Though the content changed, Shirk appears to have employed a similar approach to construction in her much later "desert" series. At that time she often worked with the bracelet format because it included space (for the wrist).

Then, in 1980, British jeweler Edward de Large introduced Americans to the possibilities of coloring titanium. Through his example Shirk began to add color to her brooches, which were still cool, intellectual, and all about space and movement. An unforgiving space-age metal, titanium is light and strong, and produces predictable colors when subjected to an electrical current. It was altogether a fitting material with which Shirk could continue to build sculptural jewelry that was modernist and architectural. Like a series of metal sticks casually dropped on one's shoulder, the pieces seemed unrelated to the human body on which they rested. Shirk wanted people to feel as if the work wasn't held together, as if it were just a momentary construction glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye. She would revisit this seemingly accidental arrangement of forms in a very different configuration some 30 years hence. Though the brooches did contain colored elements, they otherwise remained limited to a silvery range. By contrast, her work of the middle 1980s forward is like dreaming in Technicolor. Tiring of the constraints of designing for the body, the titanium brooches from 1982 were the last jewelry Shirk made for several decades. Significant changes in her personal and professional life led her in quite another direction.

Desert Series, 1984
copper, brass, patina
12 x 19 x 10"
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK



Fragile Core, 1992
copper, patina
4 ½ x 22 x 22"
PHOTO: WILL GULLETTE

In 1983 Shirk spent a sabbatical year in England. After a dreary London winter, she returned to the warm California sun, embracing both the exotic desert plant life she had left behind, and the transformative event of the birth of her son. It goes without saying that both events were to have far-reaching effects on her output. Later, Shirk would say she felt "the power and mystery in life, and with this came the desire to work more simply, to make objects whose impact was forceful and strongly emotional rather than intellectual, pieces with spirit and vitality, and, to a certain degree, mystery."

Without making an essentialist argument for the female perspective, nonetheless it's tempting to say that Shirk's forms began to soften after 1983, and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s she did concentrate on the vessel. Much of what Shirk has said about her double-etched bowls of the late 1980s can be read as a metaphor for motherhood. Two nesting bowls, seemingly attached, are actually autonomous; seemingly fragile, they are actually strong. In contrast to her previously complex fabrication techniques, these vessels were not soldered but cold connected, developed through a layered relationship of parts, much as plants grow. At the same time, like the titanium brooches with their illusory spontaneity, the large botanical vessels have that "freeze frame" quality.

Her work spans nearly a half-century of American metalsmithing and in so doing reflects the changing thematic and material concerns of the field.

Though botanical in origin, Shirk's vessels don't imply vulnerability, in the way of, say, Sue Amendolara's Hawaiian-inspired nesting florals. Yet, where some saw her early 1980s vessels as harsh and aggressive, she saw strength. The soaring angles of bowls with their rich and varied patinas echo the giant agave plants that survive in the desert. In 1985 Gary Griffin observed that Shirk's angular and seemingly aggressive bowls suggested not the spikes of desert cactus, but electric guitars, a distinctly urban sensibility well suited to the 1980s.[2] Quite possibly Shirk thought of the pointy vessels as relating to her natural environment, but they were actually communicating something else entirely: the zeitgeist of the early 1980s. Yet to Texas artist Beverly Penn, "The metaphor of the desert succulent as vessel or container (the cactus is literally a preserver of water in the arid environment) [was] insightful and inspired."[3] Such varied interpretations reveal as much about the tenor of the times and the level of engagement in contemporary metalsmithing as they do the meaning of the work.

In 1989 Shirk had a retrospective of more than 60

Sustaining Spirit XIV, 1995
copper, patina
7 x 24 x 24"
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK

Pod Stacks (drawing), 2005
brush, pen on paper
5 x 6"

objects at the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. At that time she talked publicly about being a mother. Metalsmiths at Shirk's level who were also mothers were scarce then; certainly few were openly discussing the profound change in their personal lives. Only later, women such as Sharon Church would frankly acknowledge their own experience of motherhood. It is perhaps no accident that, like Church, Shirk's mature work is animated by a deep connection to the natural world, a generative life force, and the insistent life force of plants. Not to mention tenacity, resilience, and beauty. Shirk also cites Norwegian artist Liv Blavarp as a kindred spirit, not only in terms of subject matter and scale (large colorful botanicals), but as someone whose work also changed when she had a child.

At first the flaring bowls and vases of the early 1990s, with their rough etched lines and scrabbly, patinaed surfaces, suggest a kind of repellent lace, one more like a stinging anemone, attracting with poisonous fronds. As the 1990s progressed, the pierced forms gave way to more serene and formal vessels, with active, hand-drawn marks added to the more limited palette of the patinas and colored metals. Now the saturated color of Prismacolor pencils enlivened the animated forms. From a maker's point of view, they are nothing less than masterful. Shirk altered the spun bowls, creating undulating, welcoming, and, yes, feminine, trumpets. Like flying low over a rolling landscape, the swirling *Sustaining Spirit* seems sentimental by comparison. By 1992, Shirk's bowl *Reprieve* seems an intermediary step between the jagged and brittle vessels of the 1980s and the desert bloom of the next decade.

In 1992 geography again galvanized Shirk's career, when she was offered a six-month teaching exchange at Curtin University in Perth, in western Australia. She turned the milestone of becoming 50 into a life-altering opportunity: to live and work in this far-off place, with its reputation for botanical diversity and unique geography. Bringing her 10-year-old son with her, she intended to draw and take photographs and simply absorb the new and rich visual experience.

Shirk wrote in 1995: "The Australian bush symbolized a number of things to me, all intangible and powerful: nature, instinct, beauty, sanctuary, the primal, the non-rational and the mysterious. I was looking for access to these same things in myself and instinctively felt that the bush would put me in touch with this spiritual side. I wanted the vitality and sense of peace this side provided, and knew that it would give my work strength and focus…The character of the bush, which I had thought would be harsh and intimidating, was in fact home to stunning beauty, variety, and delicacy."

The work of this time and the following decade seems characteristically Australian, thanks to the impact of the natural environment. As if ordinary nature were not exciting enough for artists, Australia's

evolutionary isolation created numerous fantastical species, such as the colorful Banksia, among many others. Shirk's botanical vessels are reminiscent of the work of Australia's Julie Blyfield, and the flat double-layer brooches recall Marian Hosking. Vessels, Shirk's longtime theme, evolved from a purely metalworking vocabulary to more organic, sensual soft forms, as if she were simply draping the plant over her stakes.

Although the leaves are realistically portrayed, the volume of metal moved prevents them from being "merely" representation, and in recent years the coloration has become more nuanced, more realistic, and less an imagined dreamscape. At the same time Shirk's detailed knowledge, supported by repeated drawings and photographs, serves her well in communicating the specificity of each plant. Although Shirk had studied painting as an undergraduate with Pardon, it was Eikerman who stressed the importance of drawing, and decades later this practice still served her well. Though the drawings have the unmistakable spontaneity of a gesture that lives only on paper, it would not be fair to say that animation is lost in the metal. The visible hammer marks remain tangible evidence of what Sharon Church, who also creates volume derived from realistic rendering, has called the "heartbeat" that is forged into the metal with every hammer blow. With the complex botanical forms, Shirk returned to soldering components together before coloring them.

"To make objects whose impact was forceful and strongly emotional rather than intellectual, pieces with spirit and vitality, and, to a certain degree, mystery."

Shirk has always been generous in talking about her process; early reviews or articles about her works often contain technical information on their construction

By Nature Ornamental, 2006
copper (before and after patina and colored pencils)
17 x 13 x 7"

and finishing. Employing a hammer and traditional metalsmithing techniques allows Shirk to "develop forms which are visually energetic, organic, and strongly three-dimensional," she says. Rather than trying to faithfully reproduce a botanical reality, she aims at creating a kind of emotional truth. Form comes first; the attitude of the piece comes from the form. The color is the hardest part to bring off, though not technically. When the copper form is ready to be colored, it is sandblasted. At this point the whole piece is pink. Shirk has developed a system to add the color. She makes many sketches, exploring different color scenarios, and then she photographs the sandblasted piece. She then works color on a black-and-white photo of the piece, trying on different "skins." She makes the jump from two to three dimensions, using many rotational angles to completely visualize the entire piece from all sides. Throughout the long process of building the forms, soldering them together, and assembling the entire sculpture, she tries always to remain faithful to the impulse that made her build it in the first place. Though she may work on a single idea within a whole group of vessels, in fact she builds only one piece at a time.

Shirk reflects on the uncertainty of the times, the disappearance of plant and animal life, and the escalating havoc wreaked on the world in her lifetime.

It might be premature to call "Traces," a new series of silver brooches, late-stage work. But it is definitely a *new* stage, a movement away from the voluptuous florals to a more austere, "wintry" aesthetic. Using the vocabulary of jewelry once again, Shirk reflects on the uncertainty of the times, the disappearance of plant and animal life, and the escalating havoc wreaked on the world in her lifetime. Though more intimate in scale than the vessels, they are

Olive Trace, 2010
silver, china paint, oxidized
5 ½ x 3 ½ x ½"
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK

not small. They seem at first glance a retreat from the saturated color of the vessels, like shadows on a rock. Yet they are of a piece with the shadows cast by the etched bowls, and the artist's own photos of leafy shadows. With the repetitive satisfaction of sawing, she meditates on memory and loss, loss of diversity and abundance experienced by those who came of age in mid-century, and the florescence of the post-World War II era. Like Hosking's, the flat yet dimensional brooches employ shadowplay. Where the vessels are rooted, the brooches float on the body, their leaves quivering in a passing breeze. Named for their colors, their titles suggest the earth itself—ruby, peridot, ochre—not living species, though *Olive Trace* might be the spare silvery leaves of olive trees.

In a curious way, Shirk's brooches signal a return to function. Instead of the *idea* of a bowl as suggested by the perforated and encrusted vessels of the 1980s, the brooches are actually wearable. Once meaning flowed from the form; personal narrative came later. The muscular, linear, constructivist jewelry of the post-Eikerman years and the "linear sketches" of Shirk's titanium brooches have a cool intellect. By contrast, the large botanical vessels of the 1990s hold the heat of the desert in their colors and the pulse of living things in their undulating forms.

Isolating and abstracting imagery from the desert around her, where a sudden bloom can be a shocking blast of color, Shirk has explored the natural world, a place of "delicacy and strength, splendor and oddity, sanctuary and peril, death and renewal." Designer and architect Paul Haigh has observed that ambiguity becomes eloquent when "contradictory tendencies present a dialogue of opposition."[4] Such eloquent ambiguity describes Shirk's 1980s vessels. The current brooches are less ambiguous, though no less eloquent. But the subject of their eloquence has changed. Shirk has returned to the intimacy of jewelry, the human body, the connectedness that being a jewelry maker implies. No longer focused on the solitary autonomous vessel, she sees herself part of a linked chain, with a child, the possibility of grandchildren, someone on whom to bestow the intimate object. A product of her time in the best possible ways—the 1960s as a student, the following four decades as an exacting teacher—it is still her time. It's hard to think of another metalsmith who so embodies the metal-lust of our chosen medium.

Commemorative Cup VI, 2000
copper, patina, colored pencils
12 x 31 x 10"
PHOTO: HELEN SHIRK

Marjorie Simon is a jeweler and writer based in Philadelphia.

1. Unattributed quotes taken from written or verbal communication between Helen Shirk and the author.
2. *Metalsmith*, vol. 5, no.4, Fall 1985, p. 46.
3. Beverly Penn, Review of "Contemporary American Metals," *Metalsmith*, vol. 7, no. 3, Summer 1987, p. 52.
4. Beverly Brandt, *Designers West*, July 1990, p. 97

Furthermore:
www.taboostudio.com

IT'S NEW YEAR'S DAY 2005 and I'm sitting in a café with friends somewhere in the labyrinth of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas. The conversation has turned to the Dale Chihuly piece hanging in the lobby. One friend, an international finance lawyer, describes the piece as beautiful. I am less enthusiastic. An articulate viewer, my friend is clear about what he wants most from a work. Like many people, he wants art to captivate with beauty and, eventually, to make him feel better. I suggest the possibility that an artist's job isn't necessarily about beauty or making people feel good. His simple question, "Why not?" makes me slowly, strangely uncomfortable, like I have just stepped onto a leaky boat. In that question I hear a deep-rooted skepticism; the echo of a cultural perception that a professional artist is not really an authority on the subject of beauty.

This encounter triggered for me a re-examination of beauty and the artist's relationship to it. In college I had studied aesthetics. Now, many years later, I had to confess a lack of confidence when I said the word "beautiful." It became necessary to redefine what that meant, bracketing out assumptions like perfect, pretty, attractive, cute, satisfying, appealing, seductive. Although those attributes have a relationship to beauty, I was clear that they were not, in fact, beauty itself.

My current understanding of beauty began with my college friend Lance. Raised in Tennessee, he became a lewd southern belle when reciting poetry. Every few years after we left college, I would call Lance and always ask him the same favor: "Say the poem for me again." And he would start to recite *This Is Just to Say* by William Carlos Williams:

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold[1]

Beauty and Other Monsters

BY KRISTIN BEELER

That was how I thought of beauty: so sweet and so cold. Something that required humility in the taking, even if it were false. It wasn't just the voice or the poem but the interaction, a gift across distance. Connection was a part of the beauty, even if it were remote—or perhaps because it was remote. I thought of beauty as alluring yet cool to the touch, a kind of armor, a locked garden.

Beauty is inevitably tangled up with mythologies of protection, faith, and religion. In Christian iconography, the Hortus Conclusus is a familiar representation of the Virgin Mary in an enclosed garden, closed off from sin, untouched, protected. Beauty was for me then the hortus conclusus, a sanctuary that either kept something unwanted out or maybe kept something desirable in.

While some of the answers to my questions about beauty were perfectly adequate, I felt they came from a narrow perspective. I was curious how beauty relates to life outside the artist's studio. How is it measured? How is it weighed? And by whom?

The Fibonacci spiral is the calligraphy of mathematical language. Derived from the golden rectangle, it belongs to the tradition of breaking down the mysteries of beauty into mathematically relevant assumptions. Based on the system developed by the ancient sculptor Praxiteles, the foundations laid by Greek and Roman artists set the standard for beauty in Western civilization.

Most of these standards are based on patterns in nature. But actually, when I think about beauty, I don't think about nature. I'm not as impressed by nature as I probably should be. The sunflower is beautiful, but then again, it has no choice in the matter. It has no free will. It can only follow the mathematical impulses in its genetic coding. But when jeweler Giovanni Corvaja recreates a sunflower's structure on the back of a brooch just because he can, *that* is impressive. In math, beauty is a tool for the discovery of truths, the most common example being the work of Albert Einstein. In math, deep truths can be defined as *invariants*. Invariants are defined by symmetries, which in turn define which properties of nature are conserved. These are the same symmetries that appeal to the senses in art and music, and in natural forms like snowflakes and galaxies.

I am as fascinated by the need that we seem to have for perfect beauty as I am surprised by what lengths people are willing to go to acquire it. Beauty has always walked this line between fascination and horror, piety and sin.

Max Factor's 1932 Beauty Calibrator was invented to

ELO UIBOKAND
Resistance 2 (brooch), 2009
bone, gold
5 7/8 x 3/8 x 1/2"
PHOTO: ELO UIBOKAND

detect imperfections in a client's face and where they needed his cosmetics to correct the flaws. Like a doctor sharing the results of a medical test, we tend to take as fact what has been measured and quantified.

In one aspect of evolutionary biology, anthropology and psychology combine to understand how the brain processes and gives meaning to symmetries in physical beauty. Nancy Etcoff, researcher at Harvard Medical School, wrote the 2000 book *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, which argues that physical attractiveness touches off responses hard-wired by evolution. "Many intellectuals would have us believe that beauty is inconsequential," she writes. "Since it explains nothing, solves nothing, and teaches us nothing, it should not have a place in intellectual discourse. And we are supposed to breathe a collective sigh of relief. After all, the concept of beauty has become an embarrassment." But, Etcoff suggests, "There is something wrong with this picture. Outside the realm of ideas, beauty rules. Nobody has stopped looking at it, and no one has stopped enjoying the sight. We can say that beauty is dead, but all that does is widen the chasm between the real world and our understanding of it."[2]

In the world of economics, the "beauty premium" is a factor that can be isolated and measured. Here the beauty premium is weighed as a variable of discrimination in the labor market. Economists look for exactly how physical beauty cashes out. The result is that the beauty premium is worth about 5 percent on the labor market; based on an average salary in 2005, that comes to more than $8,000 per year. The "plainness penalty" or what it costs to not be beautiful or below average is stiffer, at 9 percent.[3]

Non-western cultures have developed sensibilities about beauty springing from various aspects of society. For example, beauty in Islamic cultures is closely associated with community and accessibility. Basic notions of beauty are integral to the Koran through both poetry and calligraphy and can be seen in architecture and the decorative arts where ornamentation is fundamental rather than additional. Wabi-sabi represents a comprehensive Japanese aesthetic centered on the acceptance of transience: "If an object or expression can bring about a sense of serene melancholy and a spiritual longing, then that object could be said to be wabi-sabi,"[4] says writer Leonard Koren. "It nurtures all that is authentic by acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."[5] Wabi-sabi is

KRISTIN BEELER
Hortus Conclusus, 2001
steel, fine silver, sterling
18 x 4"
PHOTO: BALFOUR WALKER

"Outside the realm of ideas, beauty rules. Nobody has stopped looking at it, and no one has stopped enjoying the sight. We can say that beauty is dead, but all that does is widen the chasm between the real world and our understanding of it."

the characteristic feature of traditional Japanese beauty, and it "occupies roughly the same position in the Japanese pantheon of aesthetic values as do the Greek ideals of beauty and perfection in the West."[6]

As artists we think of beauty as being our tool and that we have some kind of proprietary right to its use and definition. But many fields leverage beauty and bend its meaning to support their needs. Wabi-sabi, for example, is cited as the basis for the development of open-source software, specifically Wikipedia. It is a major goal of artificial intelligence, where reproducing the mechanics of life is made easier when beauty is a primary component of the interface. Don Norman, author of the 1998 book *The Design of Everyday Things*, argues "Positive affect makes people more tolerant of minor difficulties and more flexible and creative in finding solutions. Aesthetics matter."[7]

Historically, the artist was valued as the community expert on beauty. However, we live in a time when the public audience has generally dismissed art's authority on the subject. In the 1950s, contemporary art deliberately abdicated any such authority. This historical change was effectively documented in "Regarding Beauty," the Hirshhorn Museum of Art's 2000 exhibition on the issue. Through the exhibition and accompanying catalogue essays, "Regarding Beauty" marked the tidal shift when late twentieth-century art drifted towards (or retreated from) beauty as either subject or delivery mechanism.

In 1967, John Baldessari, retreating from beauty, attempted to demythologize art by questioning the basic properties such as originality, authorship, and quality. Valuing the artist's thought process above any aesthetic considerations, Baldessari hired a sign painter to render the lettering on his canvases as artlessly as possible, as in the work titled *Pure Beauty*, from 1966-68. Baldessari's text paintings present beauty as a worn-out cliche.

By contrast, also in 1967, in Italy the movement of Arte Povera chose a different use for beauty: screening classical approaches through the sieve of contemporary life. Arte Povera had the effect of being self-conscious, self-referential. It explored the context of art-making itself, reflecting on the relationship between art and life and inviting the viewer into the conversation.

But even today, the relationship between the artist and his role in society remains undefined and often suspect. The situation seems persistent in a time when art education is considered of only marginal importance. At best, authority

GIOVANNI CORVAJA
The Golden Fleece (brooch), 2007
(back)
18k gold
2 3/8 x 7/8"

MAX FACTOR
Beauty Calibrator, 1932

on beauty has been granted to the realms of industrial design, landscape architecture, cosmetic dentistry, plastic surgery, and other vanity industries in order to fill the blank space where art has no meaning.

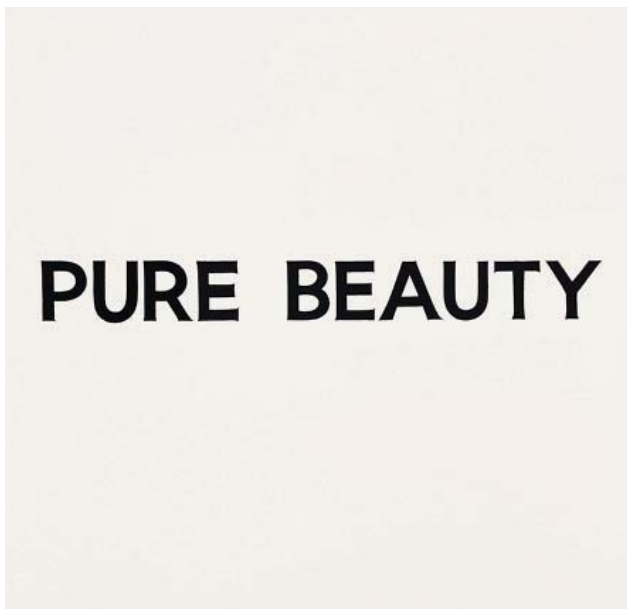
According to art theorist Jale Erzen in the *International Yearbook of Aesthetics*, "The capitalist market has used aesthetization as the medium to consumption, rather than to spiritual revelation…the image—regarding war, terrorism, poverty—has become a falsification and mesmerizing tool rather than one of knowledge and self-questioning, resulting in its being questioned."[8]

Extreme human physical beauty is, by definition, outside the norm, an anomalous event, an aberration. We see in the media where beauty is used to submerge the truth rather than reveal it. So I had to wonder, why do we need it? Alain de Botton, author of the 2006 book *The Architecture of Happiness*, argues, "That we need art in the first place is a sign that we stand in almost permanent danger of imbalance, of failing to regulate our extremes, of losing our grip on the golden mean between life's great opposites: boredom and excitement, reason and imagination…austerity and luxury. We call a thing beautiful when it contains in a concentrated form those qualities, which we personally or as a society lack. We respect a style that can move us away from what we fear and towards what we crave: a style that carries the correct dosage of our missing virtues."[9]

What I suggest, then, is that beauty is subject to a kind of psychological or cultural parallax: the phenomenon of beauty is consistent, a fixed point, but the experience is relative to the perspective of the viewer. Evidence suggests that the phenomenon we call beauty is hard-wired into us. Truisms like "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" are really not very meaningful. True, inevitably, we all seek and process beauty. And eventually it incurs the same physiological reaction, possibly fulfilling the same function.

But what I find meaningful is the nearly universal sense of balance or equilibrium that is associated with beauty. At this point, "beauty" occurs more as a need for homeostasis in a complex system, a real biological need, an evolutionary drive that must be fulfilled.

Beauty as the perception of effortless perfection is both protective and exclusionist. Its nature is unapproachable, our need for it unrealistic. We experience beauty as an internal sigh of relief when our senses connect sympathetically with the external. In those moments, beauty feels less like a



JOHN BALDESSARI
Pure Beauty, 1966–68
acrylc on canvas
45 3/8 x 45 3/8"
PHOTO: TIM NIGHSWANDER/
IMAGING 4 ART.COM

"We call a thing beautiful when it contains in a concentrated form those qualities, which we personally or as a society lack. We respect a style that can move us away from what we fear and towards what we crave."

discovery and more like a remembering.

Then what if what we crave is the aberration? If what we need is imperfection itself, the flawed, then beauty may not be very beautiful. It may, in fact, be quite challenging, maybe even hideous. We end up digging beauty out of our own mortality.

The Mütter Museum in Philadelphia is committed to preserving pathological anomalies, including fluid-preserved anatomical specimens, medical instruments, and models. The museum's catalogue employs the photo archives and professional photographers whose goal is "to stretch the boundaries, to find beauty, not in its conventional form, but in its opposite: the deformed, the broken, the disfigured body of those who suffered physical abnormality, trauma, or destructive disease. [To capture] the terrifying beauty…of those who endured nature's challenges…."[10]

This tradition of the preservation of medical oddities goes back to Hellenistic Greece, when sculptors were particularly interested in genre scenes in which caricature and exaggerated realism sat side by side. Representations of old men, beggars, dwarves, hunchbacks, and other deformed or sick people were commonplace. The grotesques may have been endowed with protective virtues, designed to safeguard their owner against deformities. The word "monster" has its roots in the Latin *mōnstrum*, meaning portent, and from *monēre*, to warn. These figures contrast violently with the canons of Greek beauty. Figurine makers would fashion deformed bodies in tortuous poses. During the Enlightenment, the cabinet of curiosities would often include "monsters" in amongst the scientific instruments and toys. Similarly, the monstrous was an important concept for aesthetics during the Enlightenment, closely associated with the wondrous and the sublime.

When I look at such images I have two observations:

1) When the plane of reality is tilted in this direction, beauty comes in through our vulnerabilities, hitting us in soft, unexpected places. It strikes a sympathetic chord.

2) If that is true, then that means that I am reflecting back some part of myself which is bent or broken or knows what it is to be ill-formed.

I recognize the monsters because they are me.

Like the beautiful, monsters offer insight, but this time in the form of vilified otherness.

AMBROISE PARÉ
The Monster of Ravenna,
16th century
Illustrated in *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, 1573

Skeleton of Cephalothoracopagus Twins,
donated 1851
COURTESY OF THE MÜTTER MUSEUM OF THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF PHILADELPHIA

Within Jeffery Cohen's 1996 book, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, he outlines the basic parameters of the monster through distinct points, mapped across culture and era. First, the monster is the physical embodiment of difference; its function is as the dialectical Other. Any kind of Otherness can be constructed through the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual.

Second, as guardian of knowledge, the monster stands as a warning against exploration of its uncertain domain. This monster prevents mobility, whether intellectual, geographical, or sexual, delimiting social spaces.

Third, the monster attracts. The linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary release from constraint. We envy and loathe the monster at the same time.

Fourth, our fixation with monsters is born of the twin desire to name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate that which threatens.[11]

As an artist, beauty and monstrosity, then, are the background themes affecting my choices of material and imagery. Pearls form the basis of my visual language, mostly as a result of their close association to these themes, particularly in literature. The most obvious examples become Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*.

Because they're so pretty, it's easy to dismiss their complex symbolic load. The pearl is linked historically to unblemished perfection and purity, and the difficulty of locating and harvesting the natural pearl is often linked symbolically to personal struggle. On the other hand, they are never far from an association with the flesh. The marine shell, because of its appearance, is associated with the female anatomy, and the pearl can be read as both the seed and the symbol of feminine sexuality and self-possession as well as the emblem of masculine possession. Their cultural associations create a kind of moral ambiguity that I find compelling.

Beauty has made me keenly aware of little monsters: the lowly, the humble, and the irritating. I look carefully at refuse and what it attracts. One favorite source of inspiration is at foundmagazine.com, a web site that exhibits a collection of discarded ephemera: "love letters, to-do lists, poetry on napkins, telephone bills, doodles—anything that gives a glimpse into someone else's life." I'm pulled in because they are simultaneously beautiful and

KRISTIN BEELER
Bliss, 2007
sterling, mother of pearl, ink
2 x 3"

Pinctada Maxima with
large South Sea pearl
PHOTO: JEREMY SHEPHERD,
PEARL PARADISE.COM

awkward and they allow me to see beneath the human skin. They remind us yet again that nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect. This is the flotsam and jetsam of life that gets tossed away without thought; notes, scribbles, and citations that weren't meant to be seen by me. Things written in what William Butler Yeats called the "rag and bone shop of the heart."[12]

Which brings me back, full circle, to Las Vegas, the city from which art critic David Hickey wrote *The Invisible Dragon*, his treatise on beauty in the twentieth century. Defining beauty seems a constantly moving target and an act of dubious merit. But there is some relief when Hickey writes, "Beauty is the agency that causes visual pleasure in the eye of the beholder—by showing us something of which we may not approve in a way we cannot resist."[13]

Beauty becomes a white plastic bag caught in the wind, as in a scene from the movie *American Beauty*. It's a piece of litter on a dirty street, but its subtlety is unquestionable. This is beauty discovered, not in spite of crude circumstance, but because of it. These are opportunities for unpredictable and luminous moments that cannot be rooted in strength, perfection, and canon. Instead they must grow, weed-like, from vulnerability and the banal.

Kristin Beeler is Associate Professor of Art, Long Beach City College, Coordinator Jewelry and Metalwork Program.

This essay is adapted from a talk the author gave at the 2010 SNAG conference in Houston.

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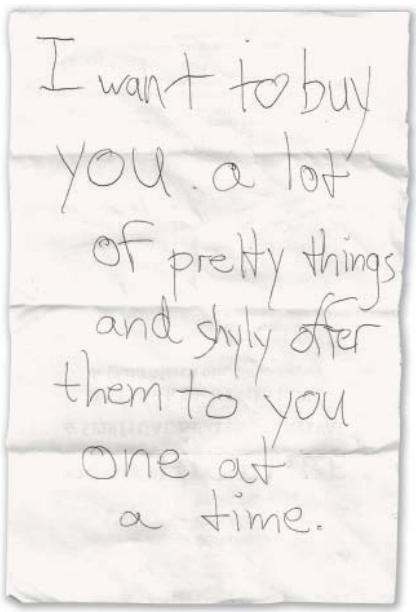


"A Lot of Pretty Things"
FOUND ON THE GROUND BY
ELI IN BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Detail of still from the
movie *American Beauty*, 1999

Heikki Seppa (1927–2010)

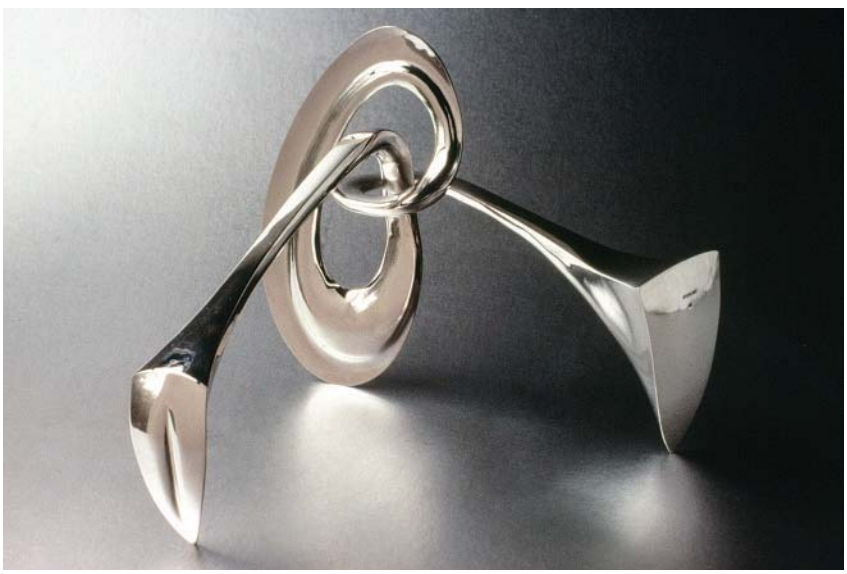
Joe Muench
Associate Professor of Jewelry/Metalmithing, Iowa State University

I FIRST MET HEIKKI as a graduate student in 1985, five years before his retirement from Washington University in St. Louis. By this time, he had firmly established himself as a pioneer in the field of metalsmithing, and was known to most for his shell forming techniques, and the associated vocabulary he devised to accurately describe the attributes and variations of these forms. These progressive ideas were recorded in his book, *Form Emphasis for Metalsmiths*, published in 1978.

The contents of the book came to life for many through technical workshops he taught across the country and abroad. I was fortunate to serve as his assistant one summer at Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina in 1991, and I observed the effect his work had on a broad range of students. Each progressive exercise was demonstrated with confidence, and concise explanation, and seemed magical, as it materialized before our eyes. By systematically following his steps, using his specialized tools, each student went on to successfully produce a similar form. These were brilliant teaching tools that provided a creative springboard, and revealed the inherent plasticity and infinitely expressive potentials of metal.

Heikki was sensitive but tough, and very resourceful, due in part to having spent from age five to thirteen in a Finnish orphanage, where he became known as a toymaker to the other orphans. At age 14, with the men engaged in World War II, he was granted a place in goldsmithing school in Helsinki. His education was very traditional, similar to that which had been given to the old men in the back of the studio, who were former workers for Fabergé, jewelers to the Russian czars. Following graduation, he worked at the factory Hopeatakomomo Oy in Helsinki and was awarded a year-long exchange internship to study at Georg Jensen Silversmiths in Copenhagen. He emigrated with his first wife to British Columbia, and then after nine years to the United States, where he attended Cranbrook Academy of Art, intending to acquire the English vocabulary necessary to effectively teach metalsmithing in the U.S.

HEIKKI SEPPA
A Change of Heart



Following a four-year teaching engagement in Louisville, from 1965 to 1992 Heikki taught at Washington University. Inspired primarily by the natural world, by the mid 1970s his "shell forming" program was well underway. He, along with dedicated students, had identified and created dozens of new sculptural forms whose general appearance and inherent details were anointed with Latinized descriptors. These were intended to promote clarity, accuracy, and a common language for designers. At first these terms and concepts were not easily accepted, but today, they rest firmly in our metals vernacular. We have grown accustomed to "anticlastic" forms and the wavy sinusoidal stake they were created on. We are familiar with the mono-shell spiculum, a bi-shell or tri-shell, and have enjoyed the rich undulations of reticulation he brought to us from his early training, the subtle surface of a roll print, or marveled at his 3-D tessellation. Heikki grew very animated and excited when discussing his work. When asked what his favorite piece was, he would smile and say, "The one I am currently working on!"

One simply cannot overestimate Heikki's contributions as an artist, teacher, and innovator. He was a metalsmith's metalsmith, whose voice echoes clearly within its history and will yield innovations far into its future.

Heikki's final years were spent happily, reflecting on his rich life experiences, and

He was a metalsmith's metalsmith, whose voice echoes clearly within its history and will yield innovations far into its future.

building and enjoying his final project, a dynamic curvilinear house embedded on a hillside overlooking picturesque Puget Sound on Bainbridge Island, Washington, with kindred spirit, jeweler, and wife Laurie A. Lyall.

I will always remember his expert teaching, enthusiasm, and spirit; his love of celebration and good food, and friends; his fascination with words, healthy debates, and fast cars; his beautiful letters and exquisite drawings; and his steamy Finnish sauna.

Michael Good
Goldsmith and Designer

HEIKKI SEPPA WAS much more to me than just a friend and a colleague. His teachings gave me the grounding to pursue a philosophical and artistic quest, which has expanded with each hammer blow.

Heikki taught not just the technical aspects of moving metal, but exposed the underlying scientific and philosophical concepts of dissipative movements.

I will always remember our discussions in the sauna, which, in almost every instance, stimulated my growth and awareness. If I have made any contribution in the field of metalsmithing, those conversations with Heikki were its birthplace.

Heikki worked outside of normative parameters, which sometimes led to a misunderstanding of the various techniques he was describing. However, the reward of surmounting those barriers has opened the doors to real understanding. This legacy is integrated into our nomenclature and into the work of anyone who took a class with him, sat in the sauna with him, or worked with one of his students.

Heikki was never selfish with his knowledge. He shared his questions, ideas, and conclusions, as great teachers and great human beings do. Even if Heikki's name were to be forgotten, his contribution would not be. His perspective altered the way we see and work.

As with everyone you love and lose, they don't go away. I still have conversations with Heikki in my mind.

Heikki Seppa teaching at Haystack, Maine, 1978

Reviews

Johannes Kuhnen: A Survey of Innovation

Sydney College of the Arts,
Sydney, Australia
August 5–28, 2010

by Tracey Clement

Tray, 1986
anodized aluminium,
stainless steel

The work of master Australian metalsmith Johannes Kuhnen is something of a paradox. Despite its rather familiar Minimalist aesthetic, Kuhnen's work is nevertheless distinctly his own. Originally from Germany, Kuhnen emigrated to Australia in 1981 and went on to have a profound impact on the metalsmithing community as both an educator at the Australian National University in Canberra (1984–present) and as a prolific practitioner with a unique style.

The exhibition spans four decades and many forms, from teapots and spectacles to trays, brooches, pendants, and rings. Yet each and every piece works together as part of a larger "family." And like a family, Kuhnen's creations draw from a common gene pool that manifests itself in different, and sometimes unexpected, ways across generations. The elements of Kuhnen's design DNA include a passion for repetition and variation; a particular slightly squashed oval shape; and an idiosyncratic anodized aluminum color palette of yellowy orange, turquoise blue, and warm purple.

Interchangeable Pendant System, 2000
anodized aluminium,
sterling silver, stainless steel

Examining the earliest pieces in the show, it comes as no surprise to find that Kuhnen completed an apprenticeship with Friedrich Becker. Although they are static, Kuhnen's suite of rings, made from 1971 to 1973, share certain traits with Becker's iconic kinetic jewels: a precision worthy of an engineer, a use of gemstones for their form and color, and a bold geometry which still looks fresh today.

Kuhnen's early rings also display his dry sense of humor, a characteristic of most of his work. Large clear discs of synthetic ruby seem to imitate acrylic, a subtle dig at their intrinsic value. In one *Ring* (1973), two of these pink discs are joined by a stainless steel U shape. The result resembles a very accurate version of a sketched smiley face. In 1975, Kuhnen produced a series of brooches in which black squares of anodized aluminum are punctuated by squares and rectangles of synthetic ruby. On the surface, these pieces seem very formal and quite severe. But actually both rubies and the aluminum oxide created during anodizing are made from corundum: thus, the precious and non-precious elements of the brooch are the same. It's a kind of wry jeweler's joke.

Kuhnen's playful teapots seem to have started life as rather sedate spheres, only to be sliced and diced by intersecting planes, often of brightly colored aluminum, until they become highly energized and ready to party. Kuhnen's trays in particular seem to embody his sense of humor. The outer rings of his signature oval shape are frequently segmented, not into halves or quarters but seemingly at random, no doubt following a mischievous, secret internal logic.

Kuhnen is obviously eager to share the joy he gets from experimenting with form, line, and color. Many of his jewels are interactive; in some of his early rings, the wearer

can select from a variety of spheres in rock crystal, amethyst, or chalcedony to match an outfit or mood. In Kuhnen's *Interchangeable Pendant System* (2000), the wearer can arrange brightly colored bands of both solid and striped anodized aluminum into an endless array of combinations suspended from stainless steel cable.

Kuhnen has taken the clean, cold language of Minimalism, with its hard geometry and perfect lines, and made it his own, a unique dialect inflected with restrained passion and a playful sense of humor. There is no doubting his technical prowess, but it never overshadows the work. Despite their perfection, Kuhnen's jewels and objects are precise and sleek while still retaining the warmth of a human touch.

Tracey Clement is an artist and writer currently living in Sydney, Australia.

Portable Treasuries: Silver Jewelry from the Nadler Collection

Museum of Arts and Design, New York
February 16–August 8, 2010

by Andrea DiNoto

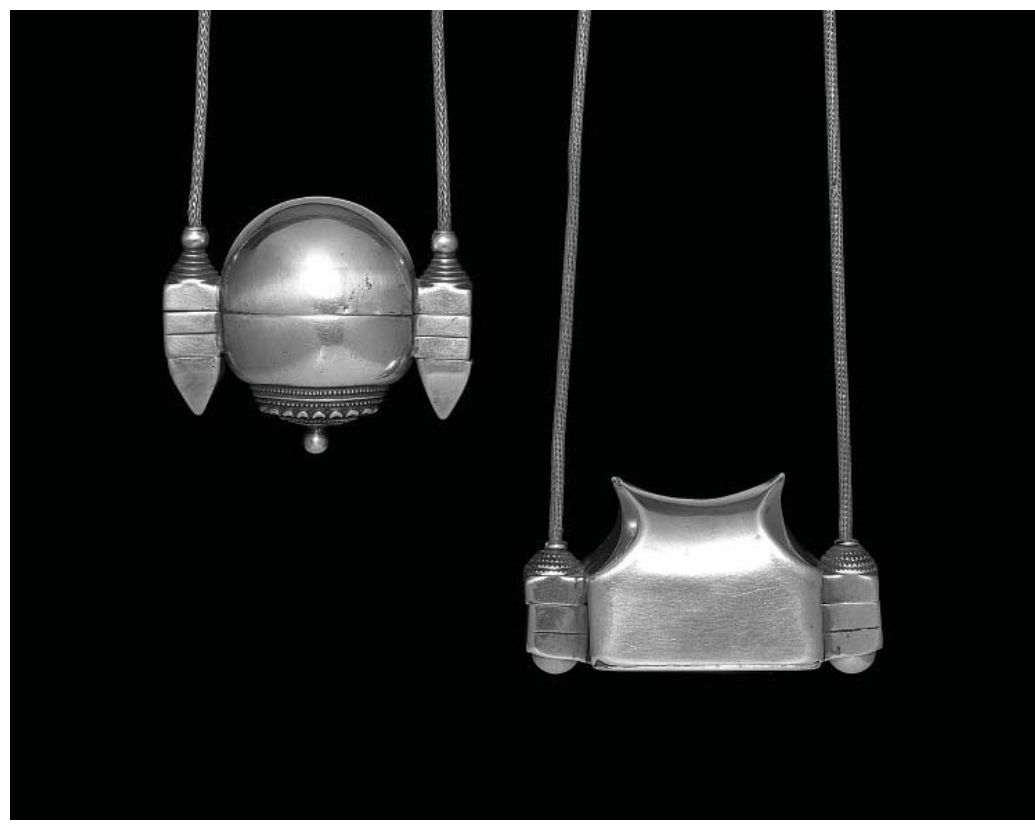
As one ponders this mix of merely bold and often massive tribal jewels—neck ornaments, two-pound anklets, belts, clasps, and chain mail adornments—one wonders how any woman could comfortably wear such objects, not just singly, but, as is custom, in multiples. However, for tribal women comfort is not the issue. Rather, as they typically bedeck themselves head to toe in their silver treasuries, they are presenting a display of personal wealth that, as collector Daniel Nadler explains, can be used as a pawn. These "portable treasuries" are usually a form of dowry that a tribal woman owns for life, but they also function, importantly, as an indicator of tribal identity, not to mention the astonishing regional artistry of the anonymous makers.

A promised gift to the Museum of Arts and Design, the collection consists largely of tribal silver from North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the hill tribes of Southeast Asia. Examples from this last area are among the exhibition's most eye-popping pieces, specifically the jewelry of the Miao and Dong cultures of China, in which massive proportion combines with formal simplicity and ingenious design. Braided and twisted torque necklaces (each weighing in at nearly three pounds) exhibit a powerful modernity, while the Miao's sculptural hooks, with coiled silver cones and projections—whose function, to attach baby-carrying bundles to the body, could not be guessed unless illustrated—are among the most extraordinary forms to be found in the realms of either jewelry or art. The Dong and Miao, women also wear dagger-sized silver hairpins that could easily function as weapons should the need arise.

The variety of design in "Treasuries" is dazzling (although many pieces appear too shiny, having been overrestored). All of these pieces demand to be understood both as singular works of art and in their cultural and ethnographic context. Unfortunately, there is no catalogue, and the museum's labels give only the form, place of origin, and approximate date (most are late nineteenth and early twentieth century), so for an explanation of motifs, metalworking techniques, and function, one needs to look elsewhere. The obvious place to start is collectors Daniel and Serga Nadler's 415-page book, *Silver: From Fetish to Fashion* from 2005, replete with full-color photos of their 800-piece collection, including most of the pieces in "Treasuries." Written in a first-person anecdotal style, the book supplies a brief overview to each of the major geographical regions, followed by dozens of sumptuous pictures of jewelry with informative captions, plus many images of tribal women fully adorned (only a few such images are included, in small size, in the exhibition itself).

The Nadlers' book devotes considerable space to the jewelry of India. Whether doing lowly fieldwork or celebrating

ANONYMOUS
Amulets, n.d.
silver
left 16 x 3 x 2"; right 17 ¾ x 1 ½ x 3 ¾"
PHOTO: JOHN BIGELOW TAYLOR



ANONYMOUS
Miao Necklace, n.d.
silver
10 ¾ x 10 x 2 ¾"
PHOTO: JOHN BIGELOW TAYLOR

her wedding, the Indian woman invariably clothes herself in brilliant cotton garments and adorns herself in silver. One of the most compelling pendant forms in all of Indian jewelry is the lingam case, two of which are on view: one is somewhat egg-shaped, the other casketlike. These hollow forms are suspended on woven wire chains, each containing a phallic-shaped polished stone representing the generative power of the god Shiva, sustainer of life. In contrast to these rather austere sacred ornaments are a variety of bracelets and anklets that include a "defensive" bracelet from the Punjab, in which lethal-looking spikes (intended to resemble rats' teeth, according to the Nadlers' book) are attached to flexible silver mesh, and a bubbly anklet from the state of Orissa, abloom with silver ball ornaments applied like berry clusters.

For anyone who wishes to delve more deeply into this fascinating subject, the book contains an impressive bibliography that would serve as a useful guide.

Andrea DiNoto is is a New York–based writer on arts and design.

Walking the Gray Area

Gallery Emilia Cohen,
Mexico City
April 16–May 15, 2010

by Lorena Lazard

The "Gray Area Symposium," held in Mexico City last April, sought "to encourage cultural exchange among jewelry makers in Latin America and Europe and to combine forces to expand the audience and market for the discipline." This ambitious and complex project focused on the current state of contemporary jewelry in both regions and featured artists' presentations, panels by academics and collectors, roundtable discussions, 13 exhibitions in various galleries and museums, and a blog involving 40 artists. With 41 countries represented, it was a truly international gathering.

"Walking the Gray Area," an exhibition during the symposium, stemmed from a six-month-long blog exchange between 20 pairs of artists, one from each region. The topics covered in the blog included jewelry, global mobility and identity, and the exhibited works were the result of these artist dialogues. Only a few of the pairs managed to keep an open exchange that was reflected in the pieces shown. In general, communication was hampered, resulting in an exhibition that tended more to reflect the individual work of each artist.

The exhibition and symposium presentations underlined some contrasts related to the artists' origin. Work by the Latin American artists, although tied to the individual, is permeated by a collective and social quality. It contains references to shamanism, *mestizaje* (a cultural identity resulting from a mix of Spanish and indigenous heritage), religion, culture, preservation of traditional techniques, and the use of local materials. The work of Mexican artist Jorge Manilla is filled with religious images and iconography, and in some cases even depicts the painful and tortuous traditions within Catholic rituals.

The European artists' work, on the other hand, is more introspective and responds to a personal rather than a collective need. The heart-themed pieces by Norwegian artist Nanna Melland clearly raise questions about life, death, and bodily impermanence. Her work strives to come to terms with the human condition.

Although the symposium focused exclusively on the relationship between Latin America and Europe, one is tempted to question the position of the United States in this structure. And in this

JORGE MANILLA
Spiritus corpus 2007
cardboard, porcelain, silver, cord, leather
PHOTO: BART VERMAERCKE

NANNA MELLAND
Das Herz, 2001
epoxy
4 ¾ x 3 ½"
PHOTO: NANNA MELLAND

globalized world, physical distance no longer prevents the simultaneous flow of information and relationships, resulting in a tendency toward homogeneity and hybrid identities. What does such globalization imply for contemporary jewelry? How does it benefit artists? Or, indeed, might it be detrimental? How can Latin American artists integrate into this globalized world? Can we even speak of contemporary jewelry as depending on the specific cultural surrounding it was created in? Can we talk of Latin American jewelry as a homogenous and independent group? All these questions, though not directly resolved, left the door open for future discussions and research.

There are obviously huge differences between Latin America and Europe in terms of their respective economies, education systems, quality of life, democratic progress, core values, religions and traditions, and these differences were reflected in the jewelry. In Europe, there are specialized jewelry schools as well as galleries, collectors, and museums that show and promote such work—not to mention the broad institutional backing and support network. In Latin America, where there are few supporting institutions and a serious lack of infrastructure, until just recently artists had to migrate to other countries, primarily Spain, to study. What can Latin American artists learn from the Europeans? What can the European artists learn from the Latin Americans? Europeans have a longer tradition of contemporary jewelry; however, Latin Americans possess a different culture and worldview. New languages emerge when different worlds meet, opening spaces and creating environments.

In addition to linking Europe with Latin America, the symposium and exhibiition also presented previously unexplored encounters and possibilities between Latin American artists themselves. It is now time for Latin American jewelers to look within themselves, and write their own history. The "Walking the Gray Area" exhibition was an excellent example of how relationships can be formed and projects built. As a learning process, it may help lay the foundations for new spaces in which to promote, generate and share contemporary jewelry, both within and beyond the borders of the discipline.

Lorena Lazard is a Mexican–born artist who lives and works as a studio jeweler in Mexico City.

Furthermore:
www.grayareasymposium.org

Chased And Repoussé

Velvet da Vinci, San Francisco
March 17–April 16, 2010

by Jennifer Cross Gans

There's hardly a novice metalsmith who hasn't tried his or her hand at the ancient twin techniques of chasing and repoussé. After a modest fling at a shell or flower design, many balk at going much further, often due in part to the wide variety of hammers and chasing tools required (many of which have to be individually designed or at least modified) and the subsequent hand strain if the work is done repetitively or incorrectly. So it was a particular pleasure to see this show of 20 artists, all expert practitioners in the craft form, which, over the centuries, has given the world monuments ranging from the busts of King Tut to the Statue of Liberty.

The show was curated by Nancy Megan Corwin, and timed to coincide with the publication of her new book *Chasing and Repoussé: Methods Ancient and Modern*, which includes much of the work on view. This selection included several pieces of jewelry, vessels, boxes, and small sculptures, with themes ranging from nature, landscapes,

CANDACE BEARDSLEE
Vessel, Botanical Study V11, 2009
copper, metal dye
8 x 5 ⅜ x 4 ¾"

DAVID HUANG
Vessel, Lucent Terrain, 2009 (detail)
copper, sterling silver,
23k gold leaf
2 ½ x 3 ½ x 4"

to narratives, abstracts, and pure design forms.

Employed together, chasing and repoussé can create volume, mass with minimal weight, and a variety of 3-D, linear, and surface textures. Some of the most striking examples displayed were the vessels made by David Huang (*Lucent Terrain*) and Candace Beardslee (*Botanical Study VII*), which combined purity of form with a variety of surface embellishments, as well as other vessels by Komelia Hongja Okim, Davide Bigazzi, Suzanne Pugh, and Catherine Grisez.

The *Self-Portrait* brooches by Charles Lewton-Brain, decorated with fine, almost engraved lines, contrasted in technique with the more traditional boxes by Joe Muench, who designed high-relief "landscapes" with contrasting light and shade and appealing tactile surfaces.

Some of the bigger jewelry pieces appeared heavy, like Christina A. Gebhard's *Dogwood* bracelets, and Nancy Megan Corwin's brooches *Black* and *Black and White*. But on the body they had a satisfying mass, combined with more flexibility than if they had been lost wax cast. Other seemingly weighty but very wearable examples were brooches by Keith Lewis (particularly *Descend*), and Linda Kindler Priest, who combined precious stones with tiny animals in repousséd gold.

Not surprisingly, themes from nature were very common. A few pieces had a narrative appeal, such as C. Greg Wilbur's *Oysters on the Mangrove* and the delightfully humorous small sculptures of a walking turkey and an armed mouse by Miel-Margarita Paredes, who accompanied them with little explanatory watercolors. Other artists preferred pure form or abstract design, ranging from Kate Case's shell-like brooches to Yuyen Chang's *Orifice* brooch and rings, smooth as folded satin.

While the tools and techniques of chasing and repoussé all have much in common, they are by no means uniform. Candace Beardslee, for example, uses Japanese traditional methods and tools as well as the more usual European ones. While most artists working in this medium will support their work with pitch, others may use materials such as Plasticine, wood, steel, brass or rubber, or soft surfaces such as carpet or leather. Keith Lewis creates his little homunculi from dies, with no support but air.

These artists were clearly united by their passion for chasing and repoussé and are currently working extensively, if not exclusively, in these techniques, making for themselves a unique place in the metalsmithing world. Although many of today's most expert practitioners were represented, there were no classical European, Russian, Asian, or Mexican designs on view, no fleurs de lis or acanthus, and no icons. However, the works in this exhibition amply carried the torch of these ancient arts.

Jennifer Cross Gans is a writer and studio jeweler in San Francisco.

Forged From Fire

Pratt Gallery at Tashiro Kaplan Studios
Seattle, Washington

March 4–26, 2010

by Matthew Kangas

Paula Stokes and Rebecca Tomas co-curated the survey "Forged From Fire," featuring forged metal jewelry and sculptures by six artists loosely associated with Pratt Fine Arts Center, a municipally run community arts center founded in 1976 in Seattle. The range of approaches was remarkably varied and included small- to large-scale objects, several of which used metals besides steel and iron, such as brass, copper, sterling silver, and gold. Stylistic influences were also wide, from Native American art and Northwest Arts and Crafts to Art Deco and the Bauhaus.

Paul Casey, a graduate of both the University of Washington and University of Wisconsin metals programs, has taught as a part-time or guest instructor at workshops and conferences around the nation. His *Offering* (2010) is two graceful curves of steel with an abstracted floral bud perched on one "limb." *Bar Pin Brooch* and *Ram Brooch* (both 2009) have a simplified Bauhaus imagery that may be traced directly to Ruth Pennington, who taught at the University of Washington for many years and dominated metals in the region. Three small diamonds in the latter contrast beautifully with the rough iron background.

Lauren Osmolski was a ceramics major at Massachusetts College of Art who switched to forging metals. *Vulture* (2008) and *Glimpse* (2010) draw upon the natural world for inspiration, chiefly birds

ANDY BLAKNEY
Deco Spring, 2009
forged steel
21 x 11 ½ x 1"
PHOTO: RICHARD NICOL

and underwater organisms. *Vulture* has a strong brooding presence, its forged copper head and talons attached to a stained base of wood.

Patrick Maher's *Trojan Horse* (2009) is a three-foot-high metal horse that appears constructed of medieval armor plates, complete with chain "reins" and solid steel wheels beneath a wooden-slab cart. More mysterious, *Pyramid* (2010) is fabricated of riveted steel sheets with a darkened square aperture on one side. Pedestal-size (27 inches high), *Pyramid* evokes early Iron Age ritual settlements, as well as allusions to the Trojan War.

Impermanence Is Sacred (2009) by David Tuthill has religious overtones. A central gold-leafed orb with a barbed wire diagonal across it, this wall work is framed by a hammered copper plate with radiating lines and 12 small circles. With tinges of red beneath the gold leaf, allusions to Roman Catholic sacred heart imagery are also possible. Besides being a working sculptor, Tuthill runs Fire Horse Forge in Seattle, executes architectural commissions, builds furniture, and teaches workshops.

Lisa Geertsen, a graduate of the sculpture program at West Virginia University, and Andy Blakney, who began his career as an apprentice blacksmith, together operate Seattle's Firelight Forge. Geertsen's *Spring* (2009) draws on simplified Art Deco figurative imagery of two fauns flanking a woman who releases a bird into flight. Concentric copper, bronze, and aluminum hills surround them. Small white aluminum blossoms with copper centers punctuate a blackened steel sky. Its companion, *Winter* (2009), is comparably decorative. Blakney's work is even more indebted to decorative art-historical precedents,

PATRICK MAHER
Trojan Horse, 2010
forged steel, brass, wood
35 x 24 x 20"
PHOTO: RICHARD NICOL

in the case of *Deco Spring* (2009), highly reminiscent of the 1933 ornamental iron and steel doors of the Seattle Asian Art Museum by Samuel Yellin. Fern fronds, a ubiquitous Pacific Northwest plant motif, are curved, but also geometrically segmented in silhouettes beneath three black blossoms above.

The issue for these artists, all of whom work with architects and builders and other designers, is the degree to which their own artistic vision can survive the exigencies of specific commissions; put another way, to what extent are their own styles cramped or underdeveloped because of the collaborative process? Jewelers, too, are subject to market forces, but many contemporary metal forgers and blacksmiths are even more vulnerable or susceptible—not to say cooperative. This could account for why so little originality was evident in "Forged From Fire," despite ample proof of the artists' masterful construction and virtuoso craft.

Seattle-based writer Matthew Kangas is the author of three essay collections published by Midmarch Arts Press.

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BY DANA SINGER

Marcia Macdonald at Smithsonian Craft Show, 2002

Marcia Macdonald, necklace

Marcia Macdonald, We Are All Rebuilding *(brooch)*

SNAG Board Member Marcia Macdonald

Former SNAG board member Marcia Macdonald passed away July 21, 2010. Marcia was an internationally recognized jeweler and metalsmith. She was a teacher, visiting artist, and guest lecturer at several leading craft schools, including the Penland School of Crafts; Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts; Haystack Mountain School of Crafts; and the Oregon College of Arts and Crafts. Macdonald was an exuberant and powerful mentor to a long list of artists working in the field today.

Macdonald's work has appeared in professional publications; in curatorial, invitational, juried, and solo exhibitions; and in the Northwest Art Collection of the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington. Her work was one of the highlights at many of the best contemporary craft shows. She received numerous awards for her work, including the Craftsman's Choice Award at the 2002 Smithsonian Museum of Art Craft Show in Washington, D.C. In addition to her long-time involvement with SNAG, she was a member of the North Carolina Society of Goldsmiths.

Macdonald's works told stories and created narratives about real-life situations. She investigated the dichotomies that life presents and that stir our emotions. Never one to shy away from self-examination, the stories were based on her own experiences.

Marcia was so much a part of SNAG conferences, craft shows, and teaching venues, it's hard to imagine them without her inimitable laughter and seemingly unstoppable energy. The field has lost one of its brightest stars.

Exhibition in Print
2010 Erratum

In the first paragraph of Garth Clark's introduction to the *Exhibition in Print 2010*, we regretfully omitted the creator of the

Gates at the Palace of Versailles

replacement gates at the Palace of Versailles. The original gates, designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart, were lost in 1789 after being torn down by mobs storming the palace. The complex job of recreating the gates from surviving drawings involved more than 100 craftspeople and historians. The actual fabrication work (consuming more than 100,000 leaves of gold) was undertaken by Ateliers Saint-Jacques metal workshop, part of the non-profit Coubertin Foundation, which focuses on conservation and is housed on the Courbertin Estate in Saint-Rémy les Chevreuse. The Foundation's workshops specialize in wood and metal, and the atelier has undertaken numerous projects at Versailles. For more information: www.coubertin.fr.

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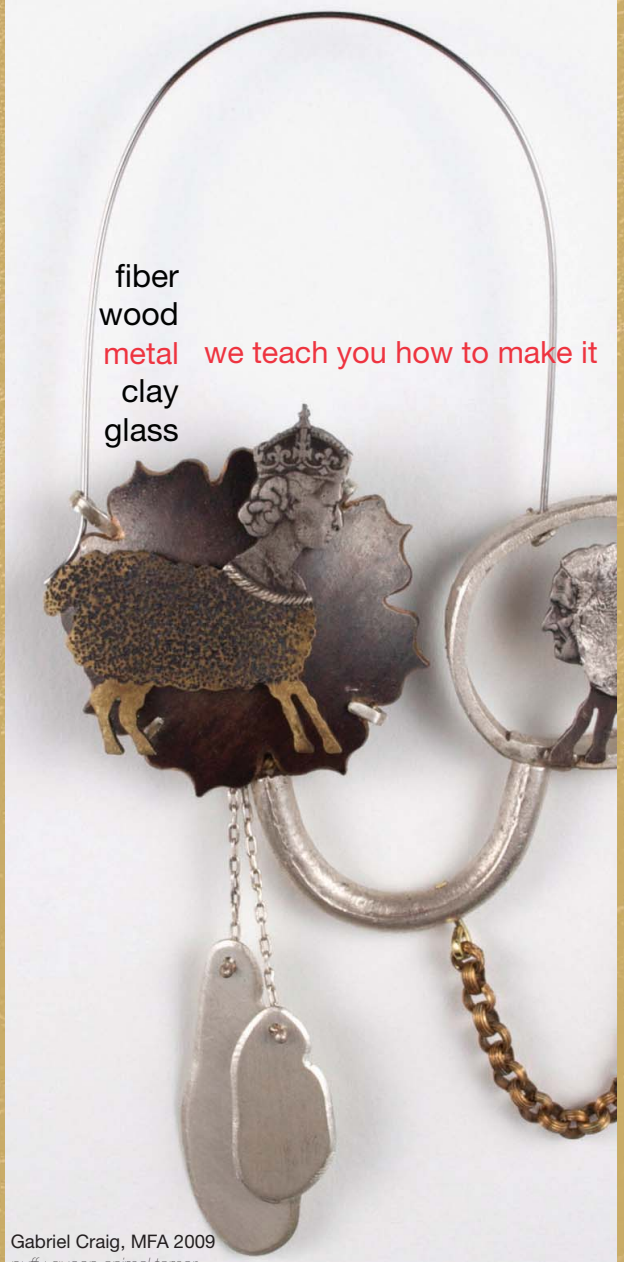

Gabriel Craig, MFA 2009
puffy queen animal tamer
2010

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Left to right: *A boy, His bike and the All-American Sport*, Nathan Dube; *Three Words*, Mary Hallam Pearse; *Hadrian's Wall*, Barbara Mann

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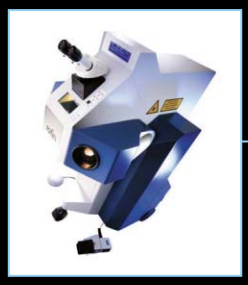

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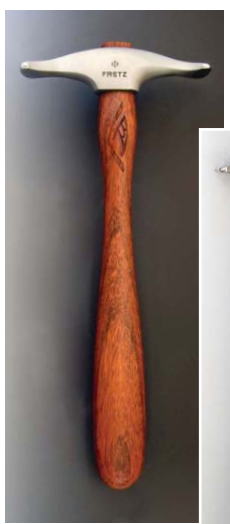

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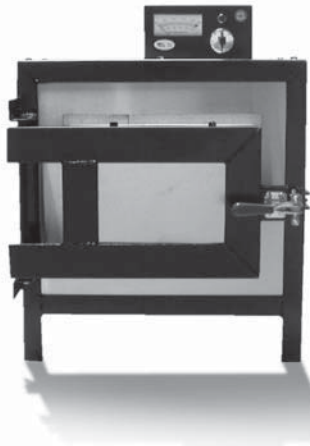

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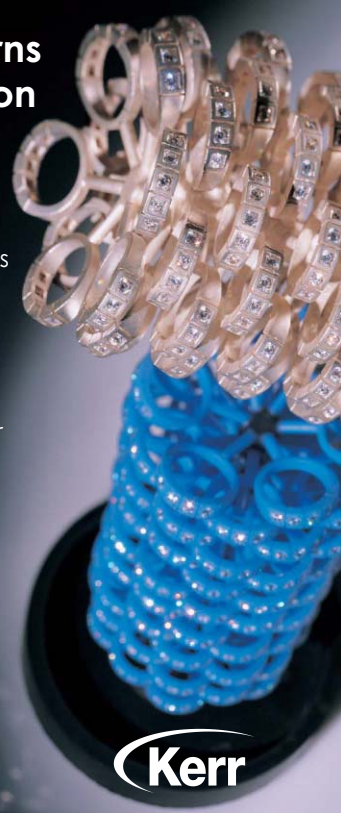

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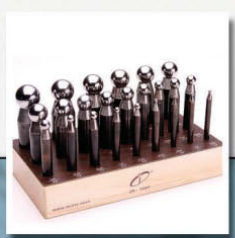

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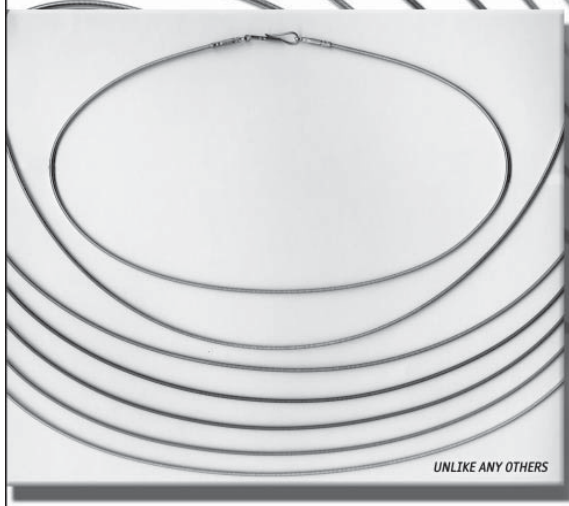

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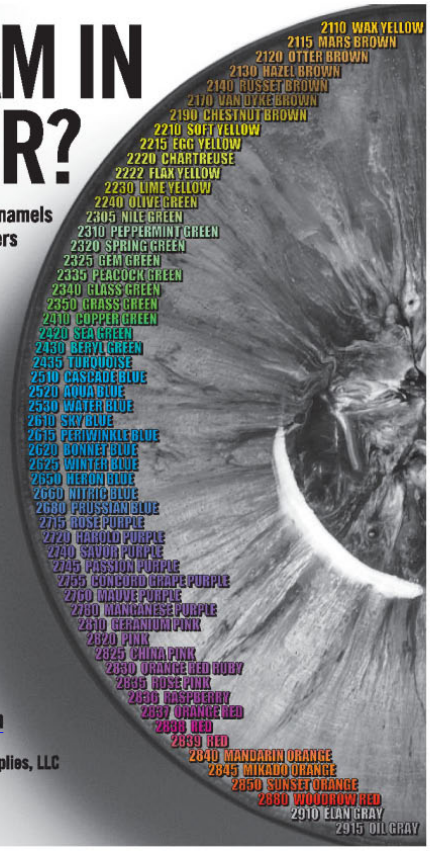

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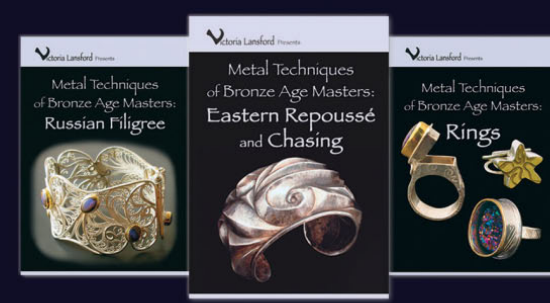

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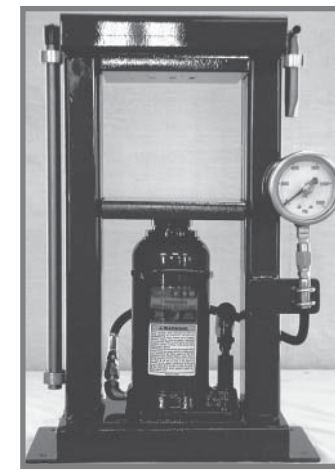

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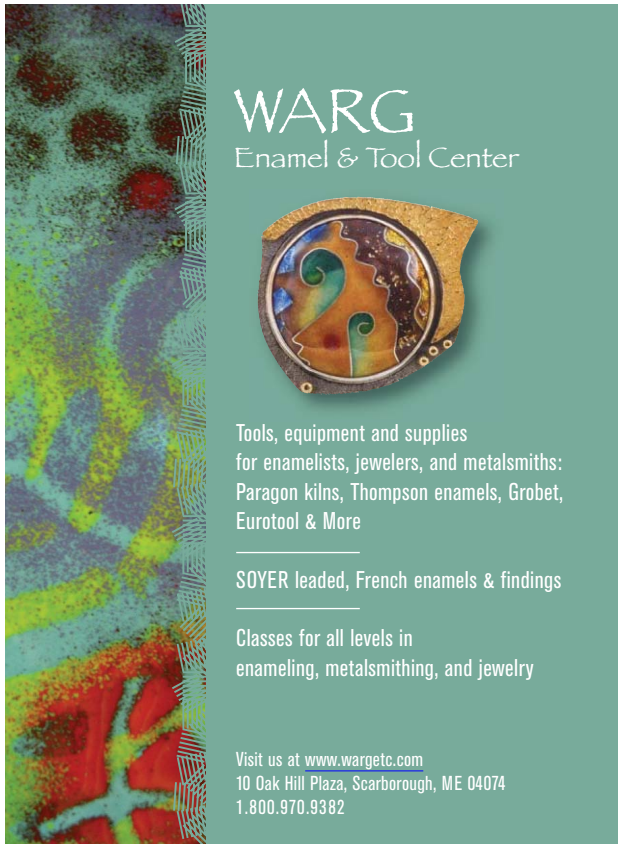
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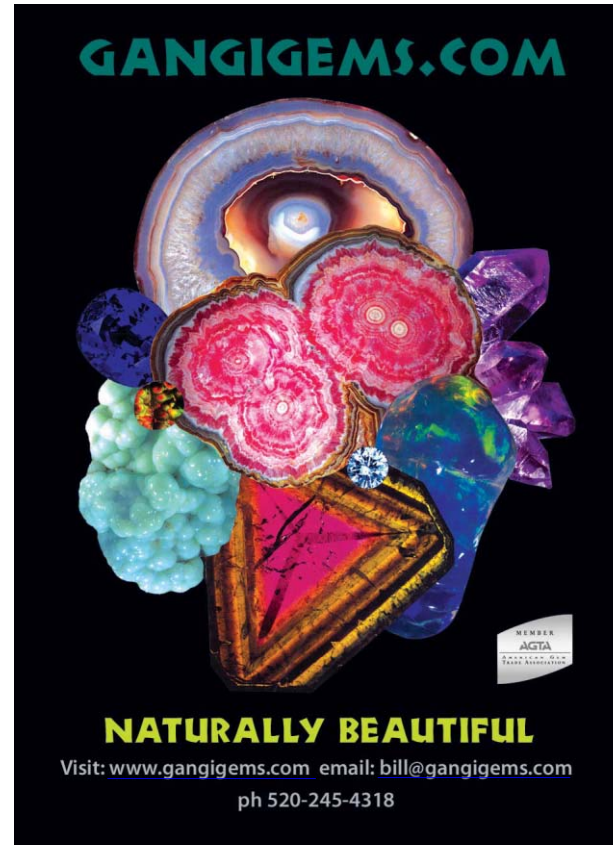
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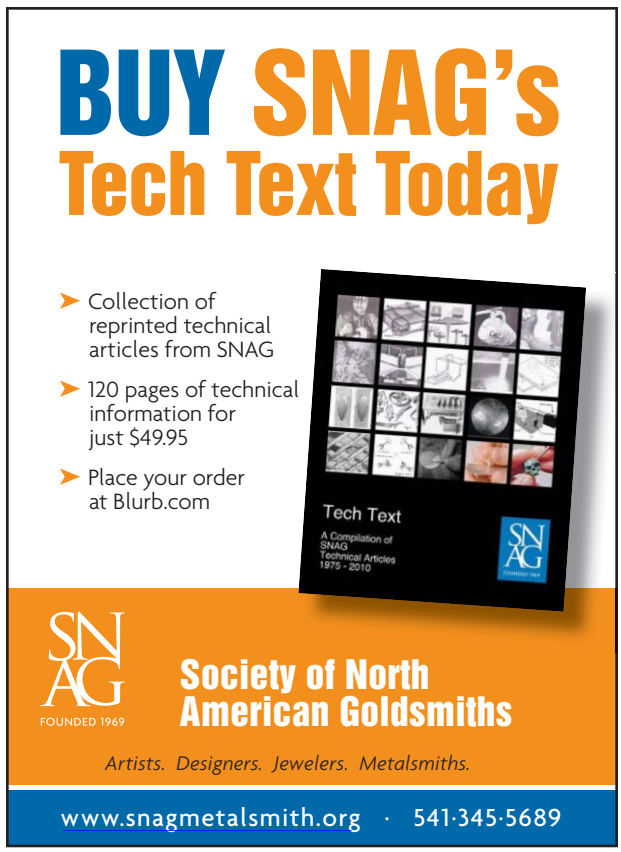
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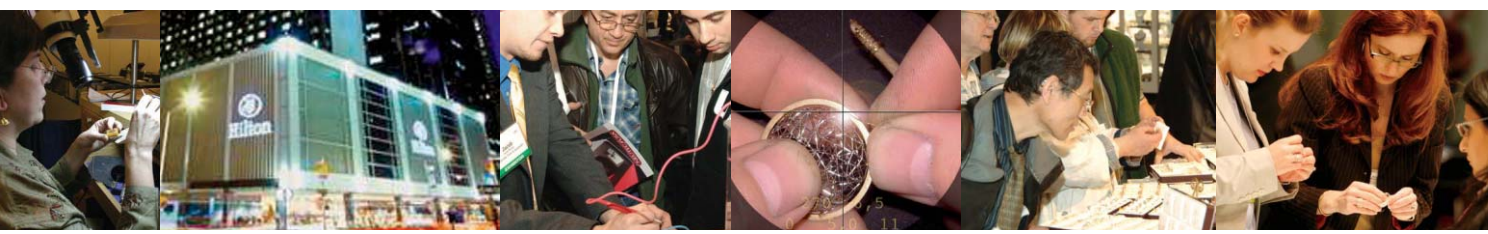

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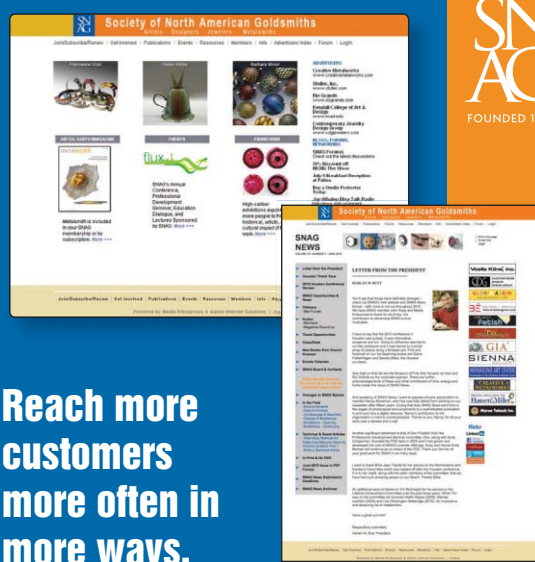

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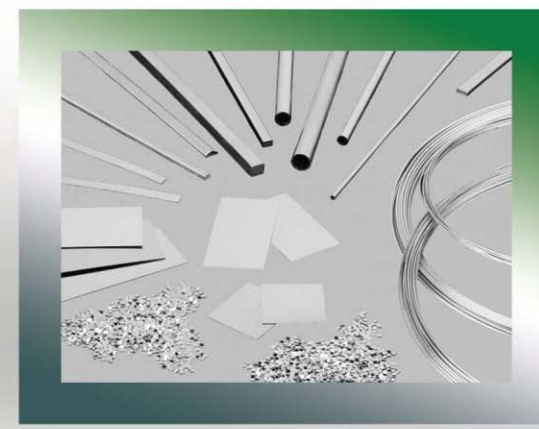

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